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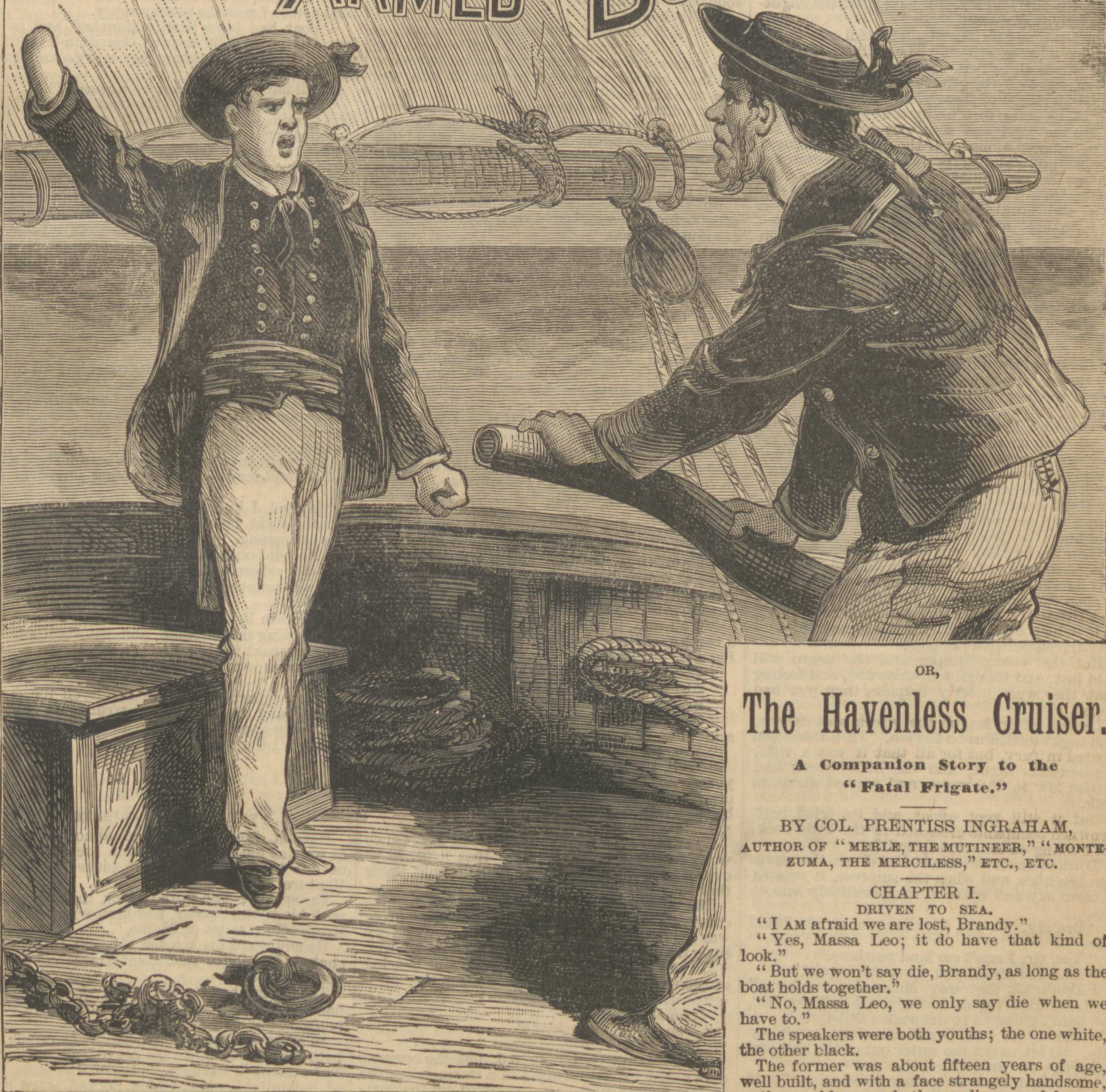
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THE ONE ARMED BUCCANEER



"DO YOU ASK, NOW, WHY CAPTAIN CUTLASS, THE ONE-ARMED BUCCANEER,
LIVES FOR REVENGE?"

OR,

The Havenless Cruiser.

A Companion Story to the
"Fatal Frigate."

BY COL. PRENTISS INGRAHAM,
AUTHOR OF "MERLE, THE MUTINEER," "MONTE-
ZUMA, THE MERCILESS," ETC., ETC.

CHAPTER I.

DRIVEN TO SEA.

"I AM afraid we are lost, Brandy."

"Yes, Massa Leo; it do have that kind of
look."

"But we won't say die, Brandy, as long as the
boat holds together."

"No, Massa Leo, we only say die when we
have to."

The speakers were both youths; the one white,
the other black.

The former was about fifteen years of age,
well built, and with a face strangely handsome,
so thoroughly were both manliness and beauty
indicated in feature and expression.

Large dark eyes, full of tenderness, and yet

lurking in their depths the glow of a proud, brave spirit; a lip firm and daring; teeth milk-white and even, with the chin denoting strength of character and a brow stamped with intelligence.

He was dressed in a sailor suit, a tarpaulin shaded his brown waving hair, and his hand, upon the tiller of the little vessel he held on her way, was small, shapely, and yet firm and strong.

The negro was the senior of his young master by several years, and his form was that of an athlete.

He was also dressed in a sailor costume, of coarse material, while his tarpaulin hung down his back, attached to a string.

They were in a little sloop of five tons, trimly built, and with a cuddy to serve the place of a cabin.

Several leagues away on one hand land was visible—a bold, rugged coast, with islands here and there, and back upon a hill, sheltered by pines was a large stone mansion.

Upon the other hand, to starboard as the sloop sped along, was the boundless sea.

Now, from landward came sweeping across the waters, a storm of the wildest fury. It had risen suddenly from behind the hills, and long before they could find a refuge under the lee of some island, the two youths knew that the storm would be upon them.

It was this which had called forth the remark opening this romance.

"I never saw a worse storm, Brandy; it is a regular hurricane, such as they have in the West Indies."

"Yes, Massa Leo; it looks ugly, sir, and the clouds are as black as my face; so I 'fraid, sir, the Sea Dog hain't going to stand up when it strikes us."

"It's about time to strip her of all but her jib, reefed down, Brandy, and then we'll scud before it, if we can; so let her canvas come!"

The negro quickly obeyed, and in a few moments the two had all shipshape, and the slightest possible canvas set.

The tempest was indeed a frightful one to behold, even to one ashore. The trailing waves of sable clouds had swept away from the land, and as it passed over the hills the trees were seen to bend, and many of them yield to its force, snapping off or being torn up by the roots.

Then the land was shut out from view, the storm dragged along over the waters, raising a huge wall of water in its wake, and the thunder was terrific, peal following peal like a combat of giant ships hurling broadsides upon each other.

The lightning seemed fairly to have set the skies on fire, and the roar of the winds and waters was terrific; therefore no wonder that those two, exposed to the fury of such a tempest, felt that their frail craft must go down beneath the shock.

But though death stared them in the face, they showed no coward fear; they meant to fight for life, even against the fearful odds they had to face.

"Good-by, Brandy, if it has to be good-by," and the brave boy held out his hand and grasped that of the negro, while his voice choked with emotion.

"Good-by, Massa Leo, and I hopes if we has to go, we both travel the same road to Heben, for they say niggers is white folks up there," and Brandy pointed upward with his right hand, while his face shone with simple faith.

"Hold hard, Brandy!" suddenly cried the young skipper, and they both grasped a firm hold upon the little vessel.

Then the howling winds swept over them, the wall of waters rushed upon them, and the sloop was hurled forward with frightful velocity.

Then came a loud snap, the mast came down, and the angry waves tore the wreckage away, as if it had been held by threads, and the hull was driven on with the gale.

But the young skipper and the negro still held fast, and though half-drowned, and feeling that they were utterly helpless, they yet had hope.

League after league the wreck was driven, and night settled upon the sea. Then the storm abated in fury, but for all that it was a wild, tempestuous night, and the little wreck had settled low in the water and seemed about to sink.

But it still kept afloat, and its tried, half-drowned occupants crouched in the little cockpit holding on tenaciously to life.

Toward dawn the winds died down, the waves ran less high, and when the sun rose, it was in a clear sky and upon a comparatively smooth sea.

"Brandy, we are fifty leagues at sea," said Leo.

"Yes, sir, I can't see land nowhere."

"And I'm afraid you never will again."

"Don't talk that way, Massa Leo. After all de Lord done for us last night, I tell you, sir, we hain't going to be drowned this time."

"Bravo for you, Brandy, and we won't say die. So let us get the water out of the hull and see what we can do."

"No mast, no sails, no oars, no nothin'," said Brandy, as he looked about him.

"That's so, and the cabin is washed clean of

provisions and all else; but she'll float better when we get the water out."

"Then out she comes, Massa Leo," and the two set to work with their tarpaulins, and began to bail the water out of the boat.

It was a long and tedious task, tired as they were with their sleepless night and without food; but at last they saw to their delight that the hull was not leaking.

But, it was their only comfort; for not a thing in the way of edibles had been left, nor covering, and only a plank's width was between them and eternity.

And thus the day passed and night settled upon the sea, leaving them drifting over the boundless expanse—drifting toward the destiny which Fate had in store for them.

CHAPTER II.

DESTINY.

"SAIL, ho!"

The cry came faintly from the lips of the boy skipper, as at dawn of the third morning since the sloop had been wrecked by the storm, he raised his head and glanced about him over the ocean, becoming light under the approach of dawn.

Brandy looked up and smiled sadly:

"I fear you're foolin' me, Massa Leo," he said, faintly.

"No, Brandy, it's a vessel, and she is coming toward us."

"Yes, they see us, Brandy, they see us, and we are saved!"

He almost shrieked the last words, in his joy, and aroused by hope the negro, who was not as strong as his young master, arose and looked out over the waters.

There, not a half-mile away, was a sloop-of-war, and she was coming straight toward them.

"The Lor' be praised! Massa Leo, we hain't dead yet," cried Brandy.

The vessel was now very near the wreck, and soon came a hail:

"Wreck ahoy!"

"Ahoy!" answered Leo as loud as he could.

"All right, my man, we will send a boat for you," answered an officer, who seemed to realize the fact that the one who answered his hail was in a pitiable condition.

Ten minutes after the two were on the sloop-of-war and in the hands of the surgeon, who was doing all in his power to bring them round, for with safety the reaction had come and neither Leo or Brandy were able to stand, or give an account of themselves.

But they rallied quickly, and the second day after being taken on board, Leo reported to the captain in person.

"Well, my fine fellow, we found you just in time; but what were you doing a hundred leagues at sea in that shell?"

"I thank you, sir, for your kindness to us, and we owe you our lives," said Leo, saluting the officer, and adding:

"We live on the coast, sir, and were on a run to Portland, when we were blown out by the storm, but oh, sir, can we not be put ashore somewhere, for my parents will be greatly distressed?"

"My boy, I am sorry, but this is His British Majesty's sloop-of-war, Venture, and we are now bound to India, if you know where that is, with the newly-appointed commodore of the squadron in those waters, and there you must go, so it will be a year or more before you can get back to your home."

The boy's eyes filled with tears, but choking back his emotion he said:

"I am sorry, sir, very sorry for the sake of those at home; but we do not wish to be in your way, sir, and I would be glad if you will put Brandy and myself to work."

"Well said, my fine fellow, and I will give you a berth as cabin-boy and Brandy—you called him Brandy, I believe?"

"Yes, sir, his name is Brandywine."

"Ah! well, Brandy can help the cook."

"Brandy is a good cook himself, sir."

"So much the better, and I guess you are something of a sailor?"

"Yes, sir."

"Well, try your luck as a cabin-boy, and if you do not like it you can go forward with the crew, begin at the fore-castle, and if you do not belie your looks, you will reach the quarter-deck yet."

"Thank you, sir," and with a sad heart Leo went forward to tell Brandy that it would be over a year before those at home would know that they were not lost.

The commodore, who was going out to take command of the British East Indian Squadron, was a quiet, dignified man, and there was very little that escaped him that occurred on board.

He had been struck by the face and bearing of the youth, and one day asked abruptly:

"What is your name, lad?"

"Lionel Lonsdale, sir."

"You are an American?"

"Yes, sir."

That was all that occurred, but the commodore noticed that one night in a storm, when the main topmast had been weakened by the parting of a stay from the top, and men feared to

go aloft to make another fast, that Lionel stepped up to the captain and said:

"I will go, sir, for my weight is not as great as that of a man."

"Do so, my lad, and let them middies see, who are even lighter than you are, that a cabin-boy dare go where they would not."

The middies were crestfallen at the rebuke, and they did not regard the cabin-boy very kindly, as he went aloft, as agile as a cat, and in spite of the great peril he was in, performed his work well, receiving a round cheer from the crew.

"The boy has stuff in him," muttered the commodore to the captain, as Lionel came down, saluted politely, and returned to his work in the cabin.

Some weeks after the vessel lay rolling upon the swell, not a breath of air stirring to fill the sails.

The day was intensely hot and the crew lay about the decks vainly trying to catch a refreshing breeze.

The old commodore came out of the cabin, glanced about him, and then determined to enjoy a swim, and the outer gangway was lowered for him.

No one noticed him as he plunged in, and Lionel, who was brushing up the stern ports of the cabin, suddenly saw him appear a short distance from the ship.

A moment more and the commodore gave a faint cry, his arms were thrown above his head, and he sunk from sight.

There was a shrill cry:

"Man overboard!"

It came from the cabin-boy and aroused all on deck.

Then came a plunge and the next moment those who thought of the commodore saw him rise, and, as he did so, he was seized in the strong grasp of the young swimmer.

"I have a severe cramp, my lad, and am helpless," the brave old man said.

"All right, sir, I can hold you up until the boat comes," was the plucky reply.

A boat had been hastily launched, and as it was pulling rapidly toward the cabin-boy, who upheld the helpless commodore, a cry arose from the ship:

"Pull hard men! a shark! a shark!"

"I see them, sir, but the boat will reach us first," said Lionel, and, still supporting the commodore he began to swim toward the approaching boat, for the ocean swell had carried them some distance from the ship.

"Pull, you hearts of oak! pull for their lives!" came in trumpet tones from the captain, while a gun was hastily aimed and fired at the approaching sharks, for there were several of them, and having scented their prey, they were swimming with wonderful speed directly toward the youth and the helpless officer.

The shot plowed up the water behind the ravenous monsters, serving only to increase their speed, and all on the ship held their breath in a horror of suspense, for it seemed that the boat would be too late.

But no, the officer had steered his boat well; the oarsmen ceased rowing as they passed between the sharks and their intended prey, and the commodore and his preserver were drawn out of the sea to safety.

And just in time.

Under the surgeon's care the commodore soon rallied, and sending for his young preserver, he said:

"My lad, I knew when I saw your face there was the right material in your make-up, and I was not wrong."

"You did one act, in going aloft that night as you did, where men and officers feared to go, which I meant not to forget, and now I owe you my life."

"Captain Bridewell will have you now report as an acting midshipman, and you shall receive your warrant to that effect in due time."

"I thank you, Midshipman Lonsdale, from my heart."

"Now report to Captain Bridewell for duty, please," and the commodore wrung the hand of the newly-appointed middy, who, with a happy heart, left the cabin.

CHAPTER III.

THE HAUNTED FRIGATE.

"WELL, Massa Leo, we're almost as bad off as we was ten years ago, when the storm blew us out to sea, and we were picked up by the Venture, sir."

The speaker was Brandywine, the negro who, with his young master, had been wrecked in the storm off the coast of Maine.

He addressed his master, who sat in an easy-chair in the large and comfortable cabin of a king's frigate.

Ten years had passed away since those two had made their bold fight for life against the tempest, and had triumphed.

In those ten years many changes had come, for both were men now: the negro tall, muscular, and a giant in strength, but with the same look of indomitable pluck which he had worn from boyhood.

The master had now the look of one born to command.

His face, handsome and winning, was yet stamped with firm resolve and daring, and the ten years that had passed had caused him to step from cabin-boy to captain, for he wore the uniform of a captain in the navy of Great Britain, though young in years, and by birth an American.

For over a year Brandy had been mourned at their home as lost, and then one day a packet schooner had landed them upon the little pier near Sealands, the home of Lionel Lonsdale's parents, and they had welcomed back as from the grave their noble son, and beheld with pride his midshipman's uniform, which he had won by his own daring.

From the day of his becoming a king's officer, good fortune seemed to lead the steps of Lionel Lonsdale, until, at the age of twenty-six he had found himself in command of a frigate.

But of that vessel, in the cabin of which he is seated, let his conversation with his faithful negro servant tell, for a strange story hangs thereto, a story of love, envy and hatred.

"You refer to my crew having been taken from me, Brandy?" quietly asked the young captain, in response to the words of the negro.

"Yes, sir."

"We are not so bad off as you suppose, Brandy."

"We've got the ship, sir, but it's a haunted one, and the admiral has not left you a single man on board."

"He'd have ordered me off too, if he had had any control over me, Massa Leo," said Brandy, speaking with the air of freedom which their long friendship, for it was friendship honest and earnest between master and man, allowed.

"Sit down there, Brandy, and let me tell you a secret," and Captain Lonsdale smiled.

"Yes, sir."

"Do you know why I was ordered to this ship?"

"No, sir."

"You know that she has been unlucky from the day she was launched in London?"

"Yes, sir, awful unlucky, from all they say."

"She was so unfortunate, through some strange fatality, to all of her commanders, and her crew, that she could find no one to go to sea in her and she was turned into a prison-ship in New York Harbor, when all on board, French prisoners and English guards, died of the scourge."

"So I heard, sir."

"Then one night in a storm she was cut loose from her moorings and driven out to sea, and no one expected, or wished to hear of her again, when one day she drove into this port before an easterly storm, and brought up against a brig, which she sunk with all on board, yet remained unharmed herself."

"Yes, massa, I heard that too, sir."

"Then it was that I was ordered to take command of her, and go in search of the French Frigate *Le Roi*, which has done so much damage to English shipping along the coast."

"And you captured the *Le Roi*, sir," said Brandy, with a smile of satisfaction.

"True, but it was not expected that I would."

"There is the secret, though, Brandy, which I have fathomed, for when I lost my brig by her sinking after her action with the French sloop, I was ordered here, as you know, and proved to be the ranking naval officer, after the captain of the port and the admiral."

"Now Admiral Fenton's son is a senior lieutenant, ranking next to me, and he had been fondly in hope of commanding the new frigate *Saturn*, which will soon be ready for sea."

"But I stood in his way, and more, he fears that I also stand in his way of winning the hand of Miss Belle Vernon, the wealthiest young lady in the Colonies."

"She does think a heap of you, Massa Leo."

The young officer blushed like a school-girl, and hastily continued:

"The admiral, though a fine officer, and stern to others, is governed by Lieutenant Frank Fenton, his son, and envious of me, and also jealous; the young officer concocted the plan that I was to go out in this *Fatal Frigate*, as she is called, after the *La Roi*."

"He never expected us to find the *Le Roi*, or he never would have gone himself as my senior lieutenant, with the ship in bad condition and but two-thirds of a crew; but he had his picked men, paid for the work, who were to raise a mutiny, declare in favor of Lieutenant Fenton, forcing the command from me."

"This was intended to disgrace me, and thus put him ahead, both as an officer and in the eyes of Miss Vernon and her father."

"But I broke up his calculations by quelling the mutiny, though I was forced to take life to do so, and then searched for and found the *Le Roi*, whipping her and taking her into port as a prize."

"You did for a fact, Massa Leo," said Brandy with enthusiasm.

"Thwarted as he was, Lieutenant Fenton then got his father to order every man from the frigate, leaving me here with you alone; and, confident of his own prowess, he sought cause for a quarrel, challenged me, and I disarmed

him and gave him his life twice, and the admiral who was on the field thanked me for it, though his son did not."

"Now I hold my orders for this vessel, Brandy, as captain, with unlimited choice to cruise where I like, and no time set for return."

"The admiral has sent the crew on board the *Saturn*, and placed his son in command, and knowing the utter impossibility of getting a crew in the Massachusetts seaports, told me I was at liberty to man the haunted frigate as I wished."

"I got this from him in writing, Brandy, and we shall have a crew."

"I don't know where they are to come from, Massa Leo."

"I will tell you, Brandy."

"I'd like to know, sir."

"You know the prison on the hill they call *The Tombs*?"

"Yes, sir."

"Well, there are hundreds of men there, of all degrees in life, officers of the army and navy, privates and ordinary seamen, civilians, burglars, murderers, and many very vile wretches, all convicts, who have been sentenced for various crimes against the king, the Colonies, and society in general."

"They're a hard lot, Massa Leo."

"Many of them doubtless are, but there are also many innocent ones among them, and I must take the good with the bad, for I shall man my frigate with the men from *The Tombs*."

The whites of Brandy's eyes enlarged at this piece of startling information, and Captain Lonsdale laughed when he looked at him.

"You seem shocked, Brandy."

"I am, sir; but Lordy, Massa Leo, does the admiral know of this?"

"No, indeed, or he'd man the *Saturn* with them, I guess."

"The happy thought has not entered the head of the admiral's son, either, and I do not intend any one shall know, for I have a man working secretly for me, whose brother and son are prisoners inside and sentenced to death for killing a king's officer who attempted to impress them into the service."

"I shall go to the prison, with the men in my pay, gain admission, make a prisoner of Captain Stone, the keeper, and then, calling in my companions, seize the night-guards in the corridor, release the convicts who have signified their willingness to ship with me, and the boats will be ready to bring them on board the frigate, when I shall at once go to sea."

"But won't they give you trouble, sir, when they find out that this is the *Fatal Frigate*?"

"No, Brandy, I fear no trouble that I cannot subdue, and if there is I must take my chances!"

"The admiral would not fit the frigate up for me, so I did so, as you know, at my own expense, and with what I took from my prize, the *Le Roi*."

"There is not a fleetier vessel afloat, nor a better sea-boat, and there is no reason the men should be afraid of her, for though she is named the *Ill-Omen*, I will prove to them that she is ill-omened only to her foes."

"But, Massa Leo, she is haunted," and Brandy spoke in a whisper.

"There is that about her, Brandy, which I confess I do not understand, and of a weird nature; but I must go ashore now to perfect my plan, and I leave you in command of the frigate—and the ghosts!"

CHAPTER IV.

THE GHOST OF THE ILL OMEN.

WHEN Captain Lionel Lonsdale had departed from the frigate, Brandy rowing him ashore in the gig, and then returning, the negro was surprised, as he drew near the vessel to suddenly hear a shrill voice:

"Boat ahoy!"

From habit he promptly responded:

"Ahoy the frigate!"

"What boat is that?"

The question came in the same shrill tones.

"The gig of the *Ill Omen*, sir," answered Brandy.

"Ay, ay; come alongside!"

The negro was standing up in the gig, and sculling with one oar astern—a style of locomotion that he prided himself upon.

Ten minutes before he had left the frigate, feeling that there was not a soul on board.

He had set his master on the wharf, and put back at once, but now came the hail from the deserted frigate, and it was no wonder that Brandy was curious.

The vessel, grand in outline, quiet and somber, lay off in the harbor only a couple of cables' length from the shore. Below her in the harbor were many vessels at anchor, large clipper ships, coasters and fishing-smacks, while half a mile away toward the sea lay the new frigate, the *Saturn*, which Captain Lonsdale had alluded to as the "bone of contention" of the admiral's son.

The *Ill Omen* was a beautiful craft, long, narrow, high in the bows and stern, and with a hull as trim as a pirate schooner.

Her masts were very tall, particularly the topmasts, and her immense long bowsprit and

spars showed that she could spread a vast amount of canvas.

She had just been wholly refitted, repaired, and her armament added to, and she was ready for sea at a moment's notice; but there was only her captain and her faithful Brandy on board.

Now, however, on his return to the ship, Brandy was suddenly hailed from her decks.

In those days every one, more or less, was superstitious, for it was just prior to the breaking out of the War of the Revolution, and Brandy naturally had the superstition of his race.

But he was absolutely devoid of fear of man, and he said to himself:

"Now that's somebody on board tryin' to frighten me."

With this idea, he sculled on to the side of the frigate, made his boat fast and clambered on deck.

It was a starlit night, and he saw the outline of the frigate from forecastle to taffrail.

As he stood by the gangway, in spite of his nerve he started, for his eyes quickly revealed the fact that he was not alone on the *Ill Omen*.

Coming from the forecastle was a human form, clothed in white from head to foot.

It came slowly along the deck, upon the starboard side, while Brandy stood to port.

The head turned toward Brandy, but no word escaped the lips, and the negro, now thoroughly alarmed, as he felt that he was face to face with a ghost, stood staring at the weird being in silence.

Passing aft, the form appearing to be that of a woman, stopped at the mizzen ratlines, sprang lightly upon the bulwarks and went upward toward the cross-trees with the motion that caused the negro to believe the ropes were not needed for a support.

Then the ghostly form passed out on the yard and standing on the end was gazed at in horror by the negro on the deck of the *Haunted Craft*.

After standing upon the dizzy perch for some time, the weird form descended to the deck and entered the cabin, for Brandy had not closed the companionway door.

Instantly the negro ran to the entrance and gazed within, to behold a bright light in the cabin, so that all therein was distinctly visible.

Not being able to see the ghostly form from his point of observation, Brandy stepped down the companionway.

He had nerved himself for the worst, and was determined to know all about that ghost.

There sat the weird creature in a chair, the one that Captain Lonsdale liked most, and one hand rested upon the table at one side.

Instantly Brandy walked boldly into the cabin and advanced to the table, confronting the ghost without one atom of fear in his brave heart.

He had seen that weird white form before, on the ship, and it had spread terror to the hearts of others who had beheld its ghostly wanderings at night, on the decks of the ill-fated craft.

Now he was face to face with it, in the broad glare of the cabin lamps, and he did not shrink.

Several hours after Captain Lonsdale returned to his vessel, and Brandy met him on deck and in a few hurried words he told his master the story of the ghostly visitor.

But the young captain was not alone, for at his back came man after man, as they came aboard from boats that were alongside, and, an hour after, in the darkness, and in a fearful storm that had swept up, the *Ill Omen* went to sea with her convict crew, driving along, under pressure of the gale, like some grim monster of the deep.

CHAPTER V.

THE CRIPPLED CORSAIR.

SEVERAL weeks after the sailing of the frigate *Ill Omen*, manned by her convict crew, a small smack was sailing along the coast of what was then known as the Carolinas.

The smack was about ten tons burden, and skimmed along under the very light breeze in a way that showed she was a good sailer, while she stood up well as proof of a stanch sea-craft.

There were two men on board, one at the tiller, and the other seated upon the cabin-deck of the little craft, and within a few feet of his companion.

The land was but a league away, and the man sitting on the cabin-deck was gazing at it with the air of one who was watching for something.

"You are not afraid of anything along this coast, are you captain?"

It was the helmsman who spoke, a large, brawny fellow, with a face that was bold though insincere.

The one he addressed was a different looking person altogether. His manners and face were refined, his bearing that of a gentleman, and yet his face was one to fear, with its dark eyes, and reckless mouth, yet which was very handsome withal.

His form was elegant, and his attire that of an ordinary seaman, though his coat, which was open, revealed a handsome officer's uniform worn beneath the coarse outer clothing.

Upon his left hand were two rings set with precious stones of rare value, and another gem was worn in his black silk scarf; but his right arm was worn in a sling, and the bandages revealed that the hand had been severed at the wrist, and evidently the wound was of recent infliction.

"No, Bonus, I am not afraid of anything catching us along this coast, but I know the land yonder, and was having a look at it for old acquaintance sake," and the speaker had a slight, but pleasant accent in his speech, which showed, as well as did his dark face, that he was of Spanish origin.

"We have had a wonderfully successful run, sir, and may consider ourselves safe now."

"I have not thought of danger to myself, Bonus, since you helped me to escape from that horrid prison, which they rightly call The Tombs."

"Don't speak of it, sir, for I shudder when I think I gave the keeper, poor Captain Stone, the powder that killed him, when you said it would merely put him to sleep."

"It did just as I said, Bonus, put him to sleep," replied the other with a laugh.

"Ah, sir, I can never drive that memory from my mind, and many a time I will regret, in spite of the jewels you gave me as a bribe, that I was false to my duty as your guard, and not only allowed you to escape, but killed the captain to do so."

"Bah! don't be a fool, Bonus. What is the taking of a human life, anyhow? I have taken many a score, in my piratical career, and I live now but for revenge," and the eyes of the one-armed man fairly glittered with hatred as he spoke.

"But who have you to be avenged on, captain?" asked the helmsman with a shudder.

"Well, let me see, my good Bonus, who I will seek revenge upon, and to accomplish which, I wished you to let me escape."

"You know that I went to the eastern coast to secure another vessel, as my schooner was in a very bad condition. I hardly expected to find as fleet a craft as was the noble little Spitfire, which had won me riches and saved me from the yard-arm by her speed; but off your port I chased a packet schooner that ran out, while I was lying under bare poles in the offing."

"That was the Pretty Ellen, the new Portland packet, sir."

"I know she sailed wonderfully well, and was dropping the Spitfire when I opened fire upon her, and, after awhile, when she was most out of range, crippled her and she became my prize."

"Now, Bonus, as you ask me about my revenge, let me tell you that on that craft, as a passenger, was a young lady whose beauty won my heart at sight."

"For her I would have been glad to have given up piracy; yes, and lived an honest life."

"I meant to make her my captive, and then win her love and make her my wife; but she scorned me, and then it was that my young lieutenant, the base dog, stepped forward as her defender."

"Well, Bonus, to humor him, I accepted his terms to fight with cutlasses, and if I was defeated, to set the lady free."

"My men have called me Captain Cutlass, the only name they know me by, on account of my great skill with that weapon, and I laughed at the idea of defeat and met him."

"But, why dwell on it, for this is the mark he left on me," and with a bitter laugh the pirate, for so he had confessed himself, held up the stump of his right arm.

"Do you ask, now, why, Captain Cutlass, the One-Armed buccaneer, lives for revenge?"

CHAPTER VI.

TREACHERY.

FOR a moment no word was said by either of the men on the little smack, which was held on her way by the helmsman.

The face of the man whom he called "Captain," worked convulsively for awhile, with the bitterness that pervaded his soul, and then he resumed:

"While I was fighting like a fool with that man Harold, a danger was coming upon us of which we little dreamed, Bonus."

"I was an idiot to let Harold fight me, and should have had my crew kill him; but then he had saved me from hanging once, when I was a prisoner, and when a couple of years later I captured a craft of which he was mate, I made him my lieutenant."

"Willingly on his part, sir?"

"No, but he had to serve me, for I needed just such a man, and it was my gratitude to him that unmanned me for, while our combat was going on the English frigate, Ill Omen, came upon us."

"You know the result. My schooner was taken, my crew sent on board the frigate, and the maiden I had—the moment I saw her—learned to love, was the sister of Captain Lonsdale of the Ill Omen."

"He took my lieutenant as an officer of the

frigate, for he had but a convict crew, as you well know, and carried my schooner into port in the fog, leaving her there, with me in her cabin in irons, and simply a note to the old admiral, for he did not like to be seen himself, as he feared his crew would be taken from him."

"That was a bold thing, sir—his taking the convicts from the prison."

"Yes, Bonus, he is a bold man. If he was not he never would have sailed in that doomed craft."

"I was on duty that night, sir, and was made prisoner while Captain Lonsdale had the men led out of their cells that he wanted."

"It was pouring rain—the very night for such work, and he left Captain Stone tied to his chair, but, when he got the crew on board, had some one who was his ally, send a letter to the President of the Town Council telling him what had been done."

"Ah, but it was a daring act, Captain Cutlass!"

"I admit it; and if Lonsdale turned pirate he would make a name for himself."

"I think he'll make a greater name when the war comes between England and the Colonies, sir."

"Doubtless, Bonus; but you wish to know about my revenge?"

"Yes, sir."

"Well, I shall just get my vessel, and then I shall go to her home and kidnap Miss Lonsdale."

"But you said, sir, if I would let you escape and set you free, you would get a vessel and leave the Colonies."

"That was a spasm of honor, Bonus, to get you to set me free. I am a Cuban, my man, and hold no interest in the quarrel of the Colonies with Great Britain. I was driven to piracy, and I shall not desert my flag."

"Oh, sir! but I regret to hear you say this, and I will not enjoy the home your jewels will enable me to buy, nor be happy with the girl I have so long been working to lay up money that I might marry."

"That is your misfortune, Bonus, not my fault, for I shall, as I said, make captive Miss Eve Lonsdale, and that will be my first stroke of revenge against her brother for capturing me."

"Then I shall capture my recreant lieutenant, Harold, and have my sweet revenge on him, as also English, my other officer, who accepted service as surgeon under Captain Lonsdale; but he shall simply serve me as before, for I hold no particular ill-will against English."

"From you I have learned certain gossip that Captain Lonsdale is in love with a Miss Vernon, a young lady of vast wealth, and to get her into my power will be a second stroke of revenge, while, for her ransom, her father must pay a fortune."

"Now, Bonus, you know what my intention is, and once I get my foot on a fleet vessel, and I know the craft I want, I will become an ogre upon the ocean that will make men tremble at my name."

"Oh, captain! I—"

"Silence, sir, and don't preach to me."

"But do you think I will not right the wrong I have done, by delivering you up to the authorities, after all you have told me you intend to do?" sternly said the helmsman.

The pirate laughed, and it was a laugh that grated upon the ears of the man Bonus.

"My dear Bonus, in telling you what I did, I talked as man would before the dead."

"What mean you, Captain Cutlass?"

"Bonus, you are a fool," and again came that harsh laugh.

The helmsman grew pale, for somehow he seemed to feel that there was trouble ahead.

"Bonus, I gave you jewels to the amount of a thousand pounds, to aid me to escape, did I not?"

"You did."

"Then you drew the money you had laid up of your own, and it was a snug little sum."

"Yes, all I had in the world, and which had cost me long toil to save."

"But, had it been sufficient for the purpose I needed it, I would not have taken your accursed bribe of jewels, and now regret that I ever set you free."

Once more the grating laugh, and then the words, as he motioned landward:

"Yonder inlet you see, Bonus, leads to a little bay, on the shores of which dwell a few wild people, men whom I know."

"It is my intention to go there, Bonus, and I do not intend you shall accompany me. You proved a traitor to your duty as guard, and once a traitor, never to be trusted. When I gave you those jewels, it was but to accomplish my end, to gain my freedom. Now I am free, and those jewels and your money I need, and only your life stands between me and their possession."

"See, I care nothing for human life, so I kill you," and, as the crippled corsair spoke, he drew a pistol from his bosom, leveled it and fired.

At the report the helmsman fell across the tiller a dead man, for the bullet had pierced his forehead.

Thus did the ogre begin his red work by treachery toward the man who had saved him from the gallows.

CHAPTER VII.

A GIRL AT THE HELM.

UPON the coast of Maine the homestead known as Sealands was the grandest one of all in the early settlements of that part of the country.

It had been built by a British naval officer of wealth who had married a lovely American girl, and giving up his home and kindred in England, had been content to settle down in the land that was the birthplace of his beautiful wife.

Loving the sea, he had made his home upon it, and his riches soon made for him a most substantial and comfortable home.

He had purchased a thousand acres in a body, and snug cabins were built for the tillers of the soil, until Sealands, as he named his plantation, became a settlement of its own.

The house was built of stone, solid as a rock, and with wings, piazzas, and a tower, did not look unlike an English nobleman's home.

The view from the front windows and broad piazza was grand, stretching out across an island-dotted bay to the ever-restless ocean a few miles beyond, and up and down the coast for leagues.

The grounds had been improved, and a pier jutted out into a little, land-locked bay, wherein rode at anchor several small pleasure craft.

In this home had been born Lionel Lonsdale and his sister, some seven years his junior, and a girl of rare loveliness.

From this home, too, had the boy, Lionel, and Brandywine, whose mother had come with her mistress, Mrs. Lonsdale, from Virginia, gone forth that day of the storm which blew them far out to sea, wrecking their little sloop, and leaving the inmates of Sealands to mourn them as dead.

Several years after the return of his son, in the uniform of a British naval officer, Captain Lonsdale had died, leaving his wife and two children to mourn his loss.

For the education of her daughter, for her son was at sea, Mrs. Lonsdale had removed to Boston, but she grew homesick there for dear old Sealands, and procuring a governess for Eve, returned once more to the home she loved so well.

After finishing her studies, Eve was deaf to all offers of hands and hearts of the gallants, whether in the army, navy, or in civil life, and seemed to enjoy more living at Sealands with her mother.

Perhaps it was that up to her nineteenth year no one had really touched her heart, for with her brother Lionel as her *beau ideal* of manhood, she was hard to please.

Then, too, an American girl, she felt pained at the treatment the colonists received at the hands of their English rulers, and Mrs. Lonsdale had often urged her son to give up his commission as a king's officer.

It is to this home of Sealands that I would have my reader accompany me, a week before the sailing of the Ill Omen with her crew of felons on board.

The mother and daughter were seated, as was their wont in the afternoons, up on the broad piazza, gazing out upon the scene of grandeur before them.

Some little while before the keen eyes of Eve had sighted a small craft winding in and out among the islands, as she sailed up the bay.

The craft carried a mainsail and jib, and was scarcely over twenty-five feet in length, while but one person was visible on board.

But she appeared to stand up well under her canvas, for the wind was blowing free, and the one at the helm handled her with the utmost skill.

"The sloop is coming here, mother, without doubt, for if not she would have gone the other side of Deer Island," said Eve.

"You are right, my child, and I hope she brings some tidings of your brother."

"No; for Leo, you know, is in Boston, and that craft comes from along the coast."

"I will get my glass and have a look at her."

As she spoke Eve arose, and stepping into the hall soon returned with a large spy-glass, which she adjusted and leveled at the little vessel.

"Mother, that is one of those smart chebacca boats, and I can see but one person on board, and—mother, it is a woman at the helm."

"A woman?" asked Mrs. Lonsdale in surprise.

"Yes, mother, it certainly is a woman, or rather a young girl, for I can see her face now distinctly."

"Then whoever accompanies is in the cabin, or somewhere about the deck."

"Doubtless, mother, but it is strange that a man would allow a girl to sail through these islands, as she has been doing for half an hour past, and not come on deck."

"He is somewhere out of sight where you do not see him."

"No, for I see the craft from stem to stern, so he must be in the cabin."

"You can sail anywhere you wish, Eve, and alone, so why not another girl?"

"True, mother, why not? But I do not recognize that boat as one I have seen before in these waters, and I know them all."

"It's strange, my child; but see, is she not heading in toward our harbor?"

"Yes, mother, she has changed her course half

a dozen points, and the girl let off the sheet rope and jib halyards alone."

"Can she be alone on the boat, Eve?"

"It certainly looks so— Oh!"

"Well, Eve?"

"She has raised a glass to her eye, and is looking ahead toward the entrance to the cove— now she turns the glass upon the house, and is looking straight at us."

"It is more than I can understand, my child; but if she appears to be alone when she runs into the cove, we will go down to the wharf and meet her."

"Yes, mother, for she is alone, or if there is a man on the boat, he is ill or hurt, so that he cannot help her."

"Let us go now, mother, as the boat will be there soon, and I am most anxious to find out who this strange girl is at the helm of the little sloop."

And a moment after, Mrs. Lonsdale and Eve were descending the winding gravel walk down to the shore of the little haven.

CHAPTER VIII.

A DEBT REPAYED.

THE little haven into which the sloop was now standing was certainly a snug harbor for any craft under a hundred tons.

A good wharf projected from the shore, and upon the end of it was an arbor which, in the winter, could be shut in with boards and used as a boat-house.

Now it was open, and a pleasant place to sit and look out upon the waters.

Here is where the mother and daughter seated themselves to await the coming of the sloop.

The young helmswoman had run into the harbor, and was steering so as to make a landing at the wharf.

She was plainly visible, and it was evident to Mrs. Lonsdale that she had no one to aid her in the management of the boat.

But she seemed to handle the craft with great skill and ease.

Giving herself ample room, she rounded up easily, and the sloop glided up to the wharf with a gentleness that was hardly felt.

Springing ashore, the young girl made her boat fast to a cleat, and then said, as she looked from one to the other of the two who met her:

"I need not ask if you are the mother and sister of Lionel Lonsdale, for your faces betray the kinship."

The speaker was scarcely over eighteen, with a tall, willowy form, which seemed also indicative of strength.

She was dressed in a blue cloth suit, trimmed profusely with gold lace, and upon her head she wore a man's tarpaulin, encircled with a gold cord.

Her face and hands were very dark, the former radiantly beautiful, the latter shapely and covered with rings set with precious stones.

About her neck was a chain of gold, studded with gems, and upon her slender, firm wrists, were massive bands of the same precious metal.

Her complexion was as dark as a Spaniard's, but every feature was perfect, the hue of health was in her cheeks, and the eyes were radiant in their brightness and intensely full of feeling.

The mother and daughter gazed upon this wonderful creature with surprise, mingled with admiration, and the former said, in answer to her words, which had been spoken in a terse manner, but in a voice that was very musical:

"I am Mrs. Lonsdale, and this is my daughter Eve, madam."

"But we have not the honor of knowing you."

The girl smiled and then said:

"Have ever heard, dear lady, of a young school girl, who several years ago in Portland, was kidnapped one night by smugglers, and was rescued by your son?"

"I hardly recall such an incident, madam."

"Perhaps Captain Lonsdale has performed so many deeds of valor, that the saving of a young girl from the hands of those who meant her harm, was not considered worth referring to at home."

There was a tinge of scorn in the words and manner, and Mrs. Lonsdale replied:

"My son has done many noble acts, and doubtless many we know not of."

"He is modest however, regarding the telling of his adventures, and besides, we do not see him so very often as he is most constantly at sea."

"Ah, yes, mother, I remember the circumstance now; but Leo saw the young lady but an instant, as he left her at the door of her school."

"I am the young girl, and I have never forgotten Lionel Lonsdale, for he saved me from more than he can ever know."

"But, mayhap, madam, you recall a schooner-of-war whose commander lay unconscious in his cabin, from a wound received in action, and his lieutenant had anchored off a coast where it was death and destruction to be caught in a storm?"

"A young girl saw the danger of the schooner, from her home, and beholding a storm arising,

rowed out in her skiff to the schooner, told the officer of his danger, and piloted the vessel to a safe anchorage."

"Finding that the wounded commander was Lionel Lonsdale, he who had saved her from the kidnappers, she had him carried ashore to her home, for there was no surgeon on his vessel, and her father, a man skilled in surgery and medicine, extracted the bullet and saved his life?"

"Perhaps you may have been told this story, madam?"

"Ah, yes, indeed, and my son owed his life to you, noble girl, and your father, for you nursed him through long weeks of suffering," said Mrs. Lonsdale, while the tears came into her eyes at the remembrance.

"You are Lola Leslie," cried Eve quickly, grasping the hand of the strange girl.

"Yes, I am Lola Leslie, and I repaid the service that Lionel Lonsdale rendered me."

"Come, you are as welcome in my home as though you were my own child; come with us to the house, and let us tell you how much we owe you in gratitude," said Mrs. Lonsdale earnestly.

"Yes, come at once, and I will send the boatman down to lower your sail and anchor your little craft off-shore."

"But are you alone?"

"Yes, Miss Lonsdale, I am alone, and I shall return at once in my craft, as soon as I have heard from the lips of your mother and yourself the truth about Lionel Lonsdale, for upon the truth hangs his life or mine," and the girl's face paled now, and she spoke with a look and manner that caused both Mrs. Lonsdale and Eve to shudder in spite of themselves.

CHAPTER IX.

LOVE-MAD.

FROM some reason, why she could not understand, Mrs. Lonsdale felt a strange chill come over her, at the words of the girl who stood before her.

But she controlled her emotion and asked:

"Will you not come to the house, and there we can talk over what you wish regarding my son?"

"No, I will hear from your lips what I would know," was the sharp response.

Eve saw that her mother, whose nerves had not been very strong, since the shock of her father's death, was becoming deeply affected by the words and manner of the young girl, and she said haughtily:

"As you will not accept the hospitality we offer you, madam, perhaps you will tell us what it is that you would know regarding Captain Lonsdale?"

The girl's eyes flashed, and she returned quickly:

"I would know if it is true that he is soon to marry a young lady of Boston, a Miss Belle Vernon by name?"

"My brother has not told us of any such an engagement, nor written us, and I cannot believe, as he only has been a few months in Boston, that he would marry any one whom he had known so short a time."

"You say it is not true, then?" eagerly asked the girl.

"To the best of my knowledge and belief it is not."

"And yet I cannot have been misinformed," the girl said impetuously.

"May I ask where you got your information, madam?"

"From one who was there, and said that it was the gossip of the town."

"I cannot believe it, or my brother would certainly have written my mother."

"Heaven grant it be not true; but then I fear that it is."

"May I ask, madam, that were it true, how my brother's engagement would interest you?" and Eve spoke haughtily.

The eyes flashed, the bosom heaved, and in a suppressed voice came the answer:

"It interests me in that I love him."

"Have you any claim upon my brother?"

"Yes!" was the fierce reply.

"What claim?"

"I love him."

"Are you bound to him by any tie, or promise?" and Eve spoke coldly and calmly, while Mrs. Lonsdale, sinking into a seat in the boat-house, listened breathlessly to every word, her eyes wandering from the face of her daughter to that of Lola Leslie:

"Yes."

"By word or tie?"

"By the strongest tie that earth can have."

Eve turned pale at this, but asked in the same calm manner:

"You imply that you are my brother's wife?"

"Then I did not mean to do that."

"I can understand no other tie so strong as you speak of."

"I saved his life; I brought him back out of the very shadow of the grave."

"I grant that."

"Is that not tie enough?"

"It is a strong tie, I admit, but does it give you a claim upon my brother?"

"Yes."

"Wherein?"

"The claim of my love."

"Ah! and do you possess his love?"

"Girl, it is that which drives me mad," came the fierce rejoinder.

"Did my brother ever tell you he loved you?"

She was silent a moment, and then she said slowly:

"No."

"And yet you are so unmaidenly as to claim him?" and there was a touch of scorn in Eve's words.

"Madam, do not be severe, for you see I am almost heartbroken."

"Forgive me."

"Your brother would have died but for my father's skill in surgery, and it is said, my devoted nursing."

"He has said that himself."

"Night after night I watched by his side, hoping, praying and fearing."

"At last he began to come back to life."

"Slowly, then rapidly, he improved, and, as he grew better, I hunted in the forest and shot for him game, I fished in the deepest pools and caught him the best fish, I read to him, sung for him, played to him on the spinnet, I sketched for him and told him stories to amuse him."

"As he grew able to go about I led him through the pine groves, sailed with him over the waters, and, when one day his vessel came and he went away, he took with him my heart, my soul."

"He came back to see me once, twice, thrice, after long months had passed, and I had grown from a girl to a woman, and so I loved him with a woman's passionate heart and soul."

"He did not tell me he loved me, but I thought he did, and I held no fear for the future, until—until—I heard he loved another."

"Then I grew love-mad, then I vowed that he was mine, and that no other should claim him, and I sprung into my little sloop and came here to his house to learn the truth from you."

"I came alone, and all last night and today, I have sailed on my way, and I vow, before High Heaven, I will kill him before he shall be another's."

"Do you hear? I shall kill him, or I shall kill myself, and so you tell him, if you love him."

"Tell him that Lola Leslie makes no idle vows, and means all she says."

"I shall come for his answer before very long."

Without another word she turned, unfastened the painter that held her boat, shoved off, and taking the helm, hauled in her sheet and went skimming out of the harbor, leaving the mother lying on the floor of the boat-house in a swoon, and the daughter bending over her, bathing her face with her kerchief, which she had hastily run to the end of the pier and saturated with salt water.

CHAPTER X.

A RIVAL'S PLOT.

THE fair girl of whom Lola Leslie, the mysterious dweller upon the coast, was so madly jealous, was an heiress and a beauty.

Her father had been born in America, and, like his father before him, had "taken to the sea," to be a ship's commander.

But unlike his father "Commodore" Vernon, as he was called, for he had a fleet of vessels under his control, and all his own property too, had inherited a fortune.

This fortune he had added to, until in early life he had been forced to give up his ship and look after his vast interests.

Belle Vernon was heiress to all his wealth, which was said to be greater than that of any other person in the Colonies.

Not that Belle Vernon was the only child, for there was another, her brother, some years her senior, and a bright, handsome lad, but a trifle wild.

In fact his wild ways had led him into trouble, and one night he had been playing cards with four of his fast comrades, when the life of one had been taken.

The next morning he had been found dead, the dirk knife of young Vernon in his hand, and the three comrades had departed.

From that day the name of his son was never allowed to be mentioned in the family of old Hiram Vernon, and he looked upon Belle as his only child and heiress, dearly as he had loved the erring boy.

At the time of the opening of this story, some years had passed away since the flight of young Vernon, bearing the brand of murder upon him, and he was looked upon as dead.

His beautiful sister, who had fairly idolized her erring brother, was wont to keep in her room, in a secluded nook, a veiled portrait of the wanderer, and each night before she retired she would look at it and murmur a prayer for the poor fellow, wherever he might be.

Belle Vernon was no ordinary personage, for she possessed intelligence, wit and talent, besides her beauty and her wealth, and thus had no rival as the reigning belle and "toast" of the town.

Vernon Hall was a place where all loved to visit, old men and young, soldiers, sailors and

citizens, and its hospitality was noted and unbounded.

The commander-in-chief of the port, and in fact of the military as well—for there was no officer of very high rank there in the British Army—was Admiral Mars Fenton, a stern-faced old seaman, who was a thorough disciplinarian with all under him, excepting his own extravagant and wild son, Frank, who was a senior lieutenant in the navy.

This sprig of the sea was a dashing, fine-looking fellow, very popular, and could lead the admiral by the nose, so to speak, and, figuratively, did so when he wanted his own way.

The admiral was as extravagant as his son, was a nobleman, and yet was as poor as Lazarus, having nothing but his pay.

His son had received certain most acceptable sums as prize money, and always helping his father out, thus held a money influence over him, which is most powerful the world over.

Now, Frank Fenton, lieutenant in the king's navy, had fallen in love with Belle Vernon, including her money, and not only did the admiral urge the suit, but the "commodore" was more than willing, for so well did the old and young sea-dogs manage their financial matters, that they were supposed to be rich.

Belle Vernon, having had her heart touched, had not looked unkindly upon the gallant young sailor, who considered his chances good.

But there was a spice of coquetry in her nature, and there was another of her numerous admirers whom she was about as kind to as to Frank Fenton.

This one was Major Albert Branscombe, who was known to his intimates as "Bert" Branscombe.

He had been a midshipman in the Royal Navy, and had distinguished himself as such.

Then, feeling a desire for service in the romantic land of India, he had resigned from the navy and gotten an ensign's appointment in the army, and his daring rapidly advanced him up the ladder of promotion.

After years of service in India, he had been sent to America with his regiment, which he commanded a battalion of in Boston, at the opening of this story.

Young, as handsome as an Apollo, very wealthy, a young noble in embryo, he was courted by all who knew him, and many thought that he would win the fair Belle in the end.

But suddenly another person in uniform appeared upon the scene.

He was a man with a history too, and the only American holding high rank in the British Navy.

Who he was, other than that he had been picked up a lad, at sea, in a fishing-smack, by a king's flagship, saved the life of a commodore, and won a midshipman's berth, was not known, except that he had forced recognition and promotion by his superb courage and ability.

It was said that his life had been a romance of adventure, and, having beaten off a French vessel vastly his superior, when he was in command of a brig, his craft had been so badly used under the terrific fire, that in a storm that drove the combatants apart, she had sunk, and he had been the only survivor, being picked up the next day by his foe whom he had so fearlessly and desperately fought.

So much did the French captain admire his courage, that he ran into an English port, under a flag of truce and gave him his liberty, along with a letter to the admiral of the British squadron detailing the circumstances.

Reporting at once for duty Lionel Lonsdale had been ordered under the command of Admiral Fenton, and his coming had created a sensation in the town.

And more, it soon became noised abroad that he had come between both Lieutenant Fenton and Major Branscombe in the affection of Miss Vernon.

Realizing this Frank Fenton had begun the plot, which the reader has heard Lionel Lonsdale tell to his faithful comrade and servant, Brandywine, who, when the brig went down, had fortunately not been with his master on board, but at home at Sealands on sick leave.

Foiled in his first plot, Frank Fenton had sought a quarrel with Lonsdale, which had ended in a duel, the result of which was that the captain twice gave the lieutenant his life.

Siding with his son, Captain Lonsdale had been left by the admiral, on the frigate Ill Omen, without a man on board excepting Brandywine, while he had placed his son on the splendid new frigate Saturn, then fitting for sea.

That Captain Lonsdale had outwitted the admiral and his son, gotten a crew, convicts though they were, for his frigate, and gone to sea, the reader knows, while he had already sent in as a prize the Cuban Corsair Captain Cutlass, and his schooner the Spitfire, taking the pirate, officers and crew to swell his own numbers on the Ill Omen.

Under the chicanery of Frank Fenton, a council of officers, military, naval and civil, had been summoned, after the sailing of the Fatal Frigate, as she was more generally called, and witnesses being sworn that she was to be turned into a pirate, with her felon crew, she had been outlawed by the admiral.

And more, Frank Fenton, promoted to a captaincy, had been ordered to go to sea in the Saturn with all dispatch, and hunt down the Ill Omen, and bring her back to port.

He had sailed with flying colors, to be run back into port the night following by a French frigate, and a captured British sloop-of-war, serving under the French commander, and narrowly had the Saturn escaped having to strike her colors.

Thus matters stood at the time of my romance, if I add, that after the visit of Lola Leslie to Sealands, Eve Lonsdale had taken the stage to Boston to see and warn her brother, but found that he had sailed the night before, while, on nearing the town the horses had run away with the coach, and her death would have followed but for the pluck of Major Branscombe who had shot one of the animals, and thus stopped the team just in time to save all from dashing into a torrent.

Remaining but the day in town, Eve Lonsdale had been on the packet-schooner, Pretty Ellen, which had been captured by the Spitfire, and retaken by the Ill Omen, thus meeting the brother she had gone in search of.

CHAPTER XI.

A MAIDEN'S MUSINGS.

"He never told me that he loved me, and yet I feel that he does.

"He asked me not to think ill of him, to promise that I would know all the truth regarding him before I judged, and I gave him my pledge that I would."

The one who thus mused to herself, was Belle Vernon.

She sat in her own room, furnished with every luxury that heart could wish, and watched the beauties of the sunset.

Her father was down-town preparing to take his vessel, a new privateer brig—for the commodore had several privateers at sea feeding on French commerce—out to sea, along with the Saturn and the pirate schooner, which were to attack the French frigate and sloop-of-war anchored in the offing.

They were the same that had driven the Saturn back to port in a damaged condition, and then, in defiance, had anchored off the harbor.

All was excitement and preparation in the harbor and town, for the Saturn was being rapidly refitted, the brig, Belle of Blue Water, was also getting her armament on board, to sail under Commodore Vernon, with a crew of merchant-sailors and fishermen, and the Spitfire, the pirate schooner, was to go out, as soon as in condition, under Major Branscombe, who had volunteered, and with a crew of fort artillery men and soldiers, the major's former experience as a midshipman fitting him to take command.

These three were to fight the Frenchmen, with Captain Frank Fenton as the flag-officer.

The thought that her father was to expose himself to deadly danger had set Belle to musing, and yet the defiance of the Frenchmen, with the hope of capturing them and releasing the British crew of the sloop-of-war, known to be on board, was more than the old merchant-commodore could allow to pass without his lending a helping hand.

"In two days the Saturn, the Belle and the Spitfire will be ready to go out, and, oh! what a fearful loss of life will follow," Belle Vernon continued in her musings.

"But will they be able to conquer the French vessels, for the frigate is a match for the Saturn, and the sloop-of-war may prove superior to the little brig and schooner that my father and Major Branscombe command.

"Oh! how terrible is war! And yet he is in daily danger of death.

"How strange has been his life, and how wonderfully he has been spared.

"He has cruised over all seas and to many lands, and yet how young he is, how handsome and how brave.

"I half-thought I loved Frank Fenton, and then meeting Major Branscombe convinced me that I did not; while, when I met Lionel Lonsdale I for the first time knew my own heart.

"But he has not told me of his love, yet I believe we both read each other's meaning in each other's eyes.

"And that Frank Fenton might not feel more revengeful, when he asked me to become his wife, I put him off with my answer.

"If I had refused him he would have laid it to Lionel Lonsdale, I feel assured, and that would have made him most bitter toward him, and he hates him now enough for all purposes of mischief, I feel assured.

"Well, he shall have my answer after I have seen Lionel Lonsdale and know that he is not to be treated as a pirate, for going out, as he did, with that convict crew.

"I have confidence in him, and feel that he will do some act that will cast the charge of outlawry to the winds, for he told me, no matter what happened, to have trust in him, and I will.

"How strange that he never told me of his beautiful sister.

"He spoke of his mother and sister, living quietly at their home on Casco Bay, but I sup-

posed that he had been a fisher-lad, and had risen, and the beauty and refinement of his sister surprised me beyond measure.

"And how desperately in love with her did Major Branscombe fall; and I am glad of it, for I was a little ashamed of my coquetry with him.

"He is a splendid fellow, is Bert Branscombe, and he brought me word of Lionel Lonsdale so kindly, and has stood his friend through all.

"But he just fell over head and ears in love with Eve Lonsdale, the day he saw her, and she cut me out decidedly.

"But I am glad of it, and I hope she will return the love of the splendid fellow.

"How fortunate it was that she should have fallen into the hands of her brother, and not been the captive of that red-handed pirate.

"And it makes me shudder to think that the pirate escaped, and took the life of poor old Captain Stone to do so.

"I fear he will be heard of again upon the seas, even though he has but one arm— Ah! there comes father now, and Major Branscombe is with him.

"I am glad he has brought him here to supper with him," and Belle Vernon went down stairs to greet her father and his guest, Bert Branscombe, who certainly looked very handsome in his superb uniform of the King's Own Regiment of Dragoons.

"Is there any news?" she asked eagerly, as she led her guest into the sitting-room, adding:

"That is the all-pervading question now, Major Branscombe."

"I suppose you heard that Captain Cutlass, the crippled corsair escaped?"

"Yes, and killed the keeper to do so."

"Yes, the poor old captain was poisoned, and the guard may have been foully dealt with also, as he cannot be found, though I fear the pirate had jewels somewhere about him, and they were too great a temptation to the man on duty over him."

"It seems so; but no trace of him has been found?"

"No, Miss Vernon: some believe he is in town, others that he went by sea, still more say by land; but no one knows.

"Still I predict that the scamp will be heard of again, for he is no ordinary man, that Cuban corsair captain, and a close watch on the sea should be kept for him."

"So I was thinking, sir."

"But, Major Branscombe, what do you think of Captain Fenton's chase back to port by the Frenchmen?"

"He was wise, I think, for there were two against him, and one a match for him."

"Would not Captain Lonsdale have fought them, even against the odds, think you?"

"Yes indeed, for he is just the man to win against big odds."

"And what are your chances to win, when you go out to the attack?"

"Fair, if the frigate Saturn does her duty.

"We are near port, and, if we get the worst of it, can run back, Miss Vernon," and the major laughed, while he added:

"The little pirate vessel that I am to command has a heavy battery, and I hope the three of us can master the Frenchmen, or at least drive them away for repairs."

The commodore now entered, and soon after supper was announced, the guest retiring at an early hour.

Then Belle Vernon sought her room, and began her musing once more.

Then she retired for the night, when she was awakened by the distant roar of heavy guns, and it was soon evident that a terrific combat at sea was going on off the port.

"No, no, our vessels have not gone out to the attack, for they were not ready, and father is here.

"Then who can it be?"

"God have mercy! what if it should be the Fatal Frigate that has attacked them, for a large sail was reported coming in at nightfall!"

A few moments after there came the rapid clatter of hoofs up the driveway, and a commanding voice shouted:

"Ho, commodore! are you up?"

"Yes; is that you, Branscombe?" answered the old merchant.

"Ay, ay, sir, and I rode here from Point Lookout, where we all went from Military Hall, to see what the firing meant, and what do you think it is?"

"Captain Lonsdale attacking the French vessels," came in the clear tones of Belle Vernon.

"You are right, Miss Vernon. Lonsdale has run in and attacked the Frenchmen single-handed.

"Good-night," and the major darted away at the full speed of his horse, while the commodore called out:

"Get ready, Belle, and we will drive in the carriage to Point Lookout, for this is daring unheard of, even in that brave fellow who commands the Fatal Frigate."

CHAPTER XII.

CASTLE BLEAK.

A STRANGE house was "Bleak Castle," or "Castle Bleak," as it was more frequently called

by the scattering neighbors that dwelt near, the *near* being within a circuit of twenty miles.

It had been erected by an old Spanish exile, who had come there with his young wife and two old servants, and having money he had paid liberally for the building of his home after his own fancy.

One morning the old servants arose to find the "Don," as the Spaniard was called, and his young and beautiful wife dead, and there was a schooner in sight, sailing out of the bay, on the high shores of which the house was situated, and signs that a landing had been made.

This was all that the country folk could find out about the murder, and the Don and his wife were buried among the pines on the cliff, the servants departed and the place allowed to go to ruin.

There it remained for years, and one day a purchaser came for the estate.

The agent sold it cheap, for no one would live there, and the stranger moved in.

He was a foreign-looking man, a Frenchman, it was said, and his name was Enrique Leslie.

He had a daughter, a girl of twelve, with a dark, weird beauty that was almost Gypsy-like.

He had three French servants, a woman and two men, these were all.

The house was most dismal looking, with its weed-grown lawn, and about it was an air of desolation that well suited the name that had been given it of Castle Bleak.

About it were hundreds of spreading acres, but only sufficient were tilled to afford vegetables for the family, and all the rest ran wild.

Shortly after coming there the master sent his daughter away to boarding-school, and lived alone with his servants.

A dark-faced, austere man, with haughty manners that froze every attempt of those about him to be neighborly, he had been soon left severely alone, and this seemed to be more to his tastes.

The mansion was situated upon the brow of a hill, with huge pine forests behind it, through which wound the road to the village, some miles away.

The hill sloped to a cliff, which was two hundred yards away, and overhung an island-dotted bay.

At one side of the cliff was a small cove, with sandy shores, and this was the little harbor of the estate.

Beyond the bay was the blue ocean, stretching away to meet the horizon.

Upon the cliff grew a number of pines, and amid these were two white stones, erected by the servants of the exiled Don, at the head of his and his wife's graves.

A rustic seat had been made between two pines, near these graves, and from it a splendid view of the bay and ocean could be seen, and the well-worn path leading to the little retreat showed that some one was a constant visitor there.

That some one was the daughter of Mr. Leslie, who had finished her school days, and come to dwell with her father in his dreary abode.

Grown into a beautiful woman, Lola Leslie's beauty was yet such as to cause one to fear rather than love her.

The reader has seen her when she visited Sealands and made to the mother and sister of Lionel Lonsdale her rash vow, and which had sent Eve to find her brother, and warn him of what the love-mad girl had sworn.

She is now presented to the reader again, and in her home, some days after her return from Sealands.

If all without, surrounding Castle Bleak, is gloomy and drear, all within is just the opposite, for the mansion is furnished with a magnificence that is princely.

The floors are laid with the most exquisite carpets and rugs, the windows shaded by curtains of rare design, and the furniture is of the finest, and include all kinds, from Persian divans of silk to massive carved chairs and sofas of English manufacture.

The sitting-room opens into a library, where books innumerable are found, even in that day when books were not common, and silver candlebrasses are upon the table and mantle.

Beyond is the dining-room, and the father and daughter are dining.

The table is fairly loaded with silver service, in rare designs, and the repast is fit for a king, while the goblets of silver are filled with wine that would delight a *bon vivant*.

A man with a stern, sinister face is Enrique Leslie, and yet his manners are courtly, though cold, and his dress is rich, and of the style of a courtier of a hundred years ago.

His silk stockings are of the finest make, his knee-breeches and silk-faced coat is of silk velvet, and the laces in his shirt-front would please a dowager's heart.

His shoe-buckles and knee-buckles are of solid gold, and set with precious gems, while he wears a watch and fob-chain, gemmed rings upon several fingers, and in his bosom sparkles a ruby of magnificent size.

Behind his chair stands a footman in livery.

Lola idly sips her wine, for her thoughts seem far away.

She is pale, yet her beauty is not lessened thereby, and her dress is as rich as a princess might wear, while she is ablaze with jewels, necklace, bracelets, and rings.

"How long will you be gone, father?" she asked, presently, breaking the silence which to others would have been painful.

"A week, perhaps; but I cannot tell."

"Expect me when you see me, my child," was the response, in a kindly tone, and soon after Enrique Leslie arose from the table, and kissing his daughter good-by, went to his room, and changing his attire, mounted his horse and rode away toward the village to catch the Portland stage.

Lola Leslie seemed ill at ease from some cause.

She had hardly touched her dinner, and going across the hall entered her own room, which was furnished in the same magnificent manner.

In half an hour she emerged, and in a different dress, one suited for outdoor exercise.

Going to a door at the end of the hallway she threw it open and entered.

It was evidently a chamber seldom used, but yet the same degree of luxury pervaded it.

"Here is where he lay, hovering between life and death, and I watched over him."

"Well, I was happy then, Lionel Lonsdale, but now I am wretched."

As she spoke the tears came into her eyes, but dashing them away she turned quickly and left the room.

Leaving the mansion she wended her way along the well-worn path to the cliff, and glanced out over the sea, as she sat down upon the rustic seat near the graves.

Suddenly she sprang to her feet, a cry upon her lips of surprise and delight, while she said:

"Why there is a frigate at anchor in the Horseshoe Haven, and a boat is coming ashore."

"None but Lionel Lonsdale could have brought a large vessel in there, as I showed him how to do so when he was here."

"Yes, it is he, and the story is false."

"He does not love another. He loves me!"

"Yes, he is in yonder boat and soon will be here."

"I will hide in the pines yonder and await his coming."

"But ah! suppose he comes to tell me he loves another?"

At the thought the girl became white as the dead.

CHAPTER XIII.

THE FATAL VOW.

Two persons stood upon the cliff near Castle Bleak Home.

The one was Lola Leslie, her face white, her features set, and her hand grasping a stiletto.

The other was Captain Lionel Lonsdale, tall, calm, commanding and sad-faced.

Before the girl's flashing eyes and threatening words he has not quailed, though she had said she would bury the knife in his heart.

Then, with a sudden impulse that seems her nature, she cries:

"No, no, I cannot kill you, Lionel."

"But I vowed that one of us should die."

"I shall keep my vow, and I will be that one!"

She bounded toward the cliff, and ere he could restrain her, he had sprung from the dizzy height.

He stood appalled upon the brink, watched her rapid flight, saw her strike the water, in a way that seemed not to harm her, and cried:

"She may yet be saved!"

Away he bounded back from the cliff, dashed down the winding pathway along the hillside, to the shore below.

It had never seemed half so long before.

On the shore, their boat half drawn out of the water, his men gathered.

"Ho, lads, shove off and seize your oars."

"Be ready the moment I spring in to pull for your lives!"

He shouted this as he ran and the startled men obeyed.

Springing into the boat, as the oarsmen swung its stern around, the young captain called out:

"Quick! pull for your lives!"

"A lady has fallen from the other side of the cliff into the sea!"

The oarsmen bent their blades double in their strong pulls, and fairly lifted the boat from the water at each mighty stroke.

The cliff jutted out into the water, and below a bar had formed just in front, which had become covered with a growth of cedars.

This bar was in the shape of a bent arm, and within this was the cove, or harbor of Castle Bleak.

To get out of the cove, the boat had to cross it, a distance of a hundred yards, and rounding the arm of earth, to pull around it to the other side of the cliff was twice as much more.

The chances were desperate to save the girl, but the men were urged to the utmost, for the words of their captain rung out:

"A hundred pounds to each man if she is saved!"

The veins stood out on the foreheads and arms of the men, in their herculean efforts.

They worked for the love of their commander,

their hope to save the maiden, and the most generous reward.

Around the point swept the boat, driving along at a tremendous pace.

Down the shore of the earthen arm it fairly flew, and soon the other side of the cliff came in view.

Up to the spot where Lola Leslie had sunk dashed the boat.

Here it was brought to a standstill, by the order of Lionel Lonsdale.

Standing up in the boat he gazed about him.

His face was very pale, his lips firm set.

There was a scared look upon his face which no personal danger could bring there.

All eyes scanned the base of the cliff and looked along the shore.

The sea was a trifle wild there, as it was beaten back by the cliff wall.

The waters far and near were searched by every eye.

Not a sign of the maiden could be seen.

"If she fell there, sir, the rough waters must have dragged her under or hurled her against the cliff," said the coxswain.

"She fell just where we are, from yonder point above."

"Poor girl! poor Lola! She was mad," and the voice of the strong man trembled as he spoke.

For an hour the boat moved about along the shore, far and near, and then came the order:

"Pull back to the cove."

Landing, the young captain made his way up to the mansion, which looked trebly bleak now, and Enrique Leslie was asked for.

"The master has gone to Portland, Captain Lonsdale, I am sorry to say; but I'm sorry to see you looking so white again, sir," replied Enos, who had not forgotten the handsome golden souvenir the young officer had given him two years before, when he lay at Castle Bleak so badly wounded.

"I wished to tell him of Miss Lola—"

"She's down on the cliff, sir. It's strange you did not meet her."

"Enos, where is Clarice?"

"In the kitchen, sir."

"Ask Clarice and Pierre to come here, for I wish to tell you something."

Enos seemed impressed with the manner, and hastened away upon his errand.

In a short while Clarice, the housekeeper, and Pierre, the stableman and gardener, appeared, and they also greeted Lonsdale pleasantly, for they, too, had cause to remember his generosity.

But they saw that he was very pale, and had something of importance to tell them.

Then in a few words he told them that their young mistress had fallen from the cliff, and how he had searched for her in vain.

A wail went up from the trio, for they dearly loved Lola, whom they had known from childhood, and with one accord came the cry:

"What will the master say?"

Together they went to the cliff; the frigate, lying in Horseshoe Haven, two miles away, was signaled to send half a dozen boats ashore, and the search was renewed.

But the waters would not give up their victim, and with a sad heart it was that Lionel Lonsdale sailed away from Castle Bleak.

But he had left with Enos a sealed letter for the stricken father, in which he told him the whole truth, as it had occurred, while to the servants and the crew of the frigate he had implied that Lola had fallen from the cliff.

CHAPTER XIV.

THE LOST TRINKET.

LIONEL LONSDALE was deeply moved at the mad act of Lola Leslie, and his thoughts could not but revert to that fatal leap from the cliff.

"She kept her vow, and, but for my mother and sister, I would rather have had her kill me than take her own life."

"Poor girl, how strange that love for me should drive her to such an act."

So he mused as he sat alone in his cabin, while the frigate was on her way South, cruising in search of a French foe.

After his capture of the pirate schooner Spitfire, and rescue of his sister thereby, he had sailed for Sealands, and there he had left Eve.

He had heard from her of Lola's visit to Sealands, and from his mother that she had again been there, so he had gone to Castle Bleak with the fatal result known.

That he had been outlawed by Admiral Fenton, for running out with the frigate, and taking the convicts from the prison for a crew, he did not know, for, in her stay of a day in the town, it had been kept secret from Eve.

He knew that he had done a bold thing, however, and he meant to palliate it by some act of heroism, and so he hoped to capture a French frigate.

He had sent in the pirate schooner, with her chief in the cabin, and left her in port at anchor, with no one else on board, and a letter to the admiral.

Her two officers and crew he had taken on board the frigate, the latter being placed in irons.

In need of a surgeon, and finding in English, the pirate lieutenant a jovial fellow, scienced in medicine and surgery, and being told by him that he had been forced to serve the buccaneer chief, he had at once told him to report for duty. The first officer of the Spitfire was a young man of most attractive appearance.

His face was perhaps reckless in expression, but he was a man whose countenance bore the stamp of strong character.

His story, as told, was that he had been mate of a vessel that had captured Captain Cutlass by an accident.

Pitying the pirate, he had allowed him to escape, and a year after had fallen into the hands of Captain Cutlass, who forced him, as it were, to serve him as a lieutenant on certain conditions.

Those conditions, that the Spitfire should never cruise in Northern waters, Captain Cutlass had broken, and capturing the Pretty Ellen, he had found on board of her a passenger Eve Lonsdale.

Instantly the young lieutenant had defended her, with the result already known, and left Captain Cutlass minus his right hand.

Protecting Eve as he did, won Lionel Lonsdale's gratitude, and, as no officer among his convict crew, knew well the duties of a first lieutenant on a frigate, the one holding that place was glad to let the young pirate step into his position.

From the moment that he had assumed the duties of first officer, Lieutenant Harold, as he was known, had proven himself in every way competent for the berth, and had given great satisfaction to his captain.

In small numbers at a time the crew of the pirate had been glad to take the oath of allegiance as seamen on the Ill Omen, in service of the king, and be allowed to go on duty.

And a splendid lot of seamen did Captain Lonsdale find them, for the pirate chief had been a strict commander, and as boarders and gunners the half a hundred buccaneers had no superiors, for great had been their experience in just such deadly work as that.

Thus it was, after he had been at sea a short while the young commander had his crew under perfect discipline, they did their work to perfection, and knowing the worth of his vessel, he was anxious to meet an enemy and try conclusions with him.

It was several days after leaving Castle Bleak, that while Captain Lonsdale was seated in his handsome cabin, that Brandywine, his ever faithful servant, entered and handed him something.

Lionel Lonsdale started as he gazed at it and asked quickly:

"Where did you get this, Brandy?"

"Found it, sir."

"Where?"

"On the gun deck, sir."

"When?"

"Only a few minutes ago, Massa Leo, when I was coming along."

"I nearly stepped on it, sir, so I picked it up and brought it to you."

"I am very much obliged, Brandy."

The negro left the cabin, and for a long time Captain Lonsdale sat, looking attentively at the object he held in his hand, and which Brandy had given him.

It appeared to be a golden trinket, and attached to it was a broken chain.

Turning it over the young captain read some words that were engraven there, and then he said aloud:

"That accounts for my feeling sure that I had seen him before."

"It is the likeness he bears to her."

"How strange, how passing strange!"

"No, there can be no doubt now, and I will send for him, for he is the owner."

Then he called out:

"Ho, the deck!"

The companionway was open, and one of his officers, one he had appointed an acting midshipman, Mark Manly, appeared and saluted politely, while he said:

"You called, sir?"

"Yes, Mr. Manly, ask your father to come here please."

Robert Manly had been, with his son, in prison under sentence of death, and his brother, the skipper of a fishing smack, was the one who had helped Lionel Lonsdale to secure his convict crew.

For this reason Robert Manly had been made acting first lieutenant, and his son, a handsome lad of nineteen, a midshipman.

But Robert Manly had been glad to yield his berth to Harold, the pirate lieutenant, and take the place next in rank.

In obedience to the summons of his captain, he entered the cabin, a tall, robust man of fifty, with a frank, fearless face and the look of a thorough sailor, one who did not feel exactly at ease in the handsome uniform he wore.

"Mr. Manly, sit down, please."

The officer took a seat on the edge of the handsome chair, as though he feared he might

spoil it, for in his little fishing-smack a bench was good enough for him.

"Mr. Manly, may I ask if you know Commodore Vernon, the rich shipping merchant of Boston?"

"Who does not, captain?"

"Did you ever know his son?"

"You mean the wild fellow who killed a man and ran away?"

"Yes."

"I saw him now and then, sir, but not to speak with him."

"But a wild chap he was, and I've seen him, for sheer love of danger, take a boat out in the harbor, when everything was green with the gale, and he was said to be one of the best sailors in port, for he used to sail with his father when but a lad."

"Would you know him if you saw him again?"

"No, sir, I hardly think I would."

"How long since you saw him last?"

"Some six year, I guess, sir, and he was quite a lad then."

"Thank you, Mr. Manly."

"You are welcome, captain: but have you heard of the lad?"

"No, only if I could do so, I would be glad, as I could give him a berth aboard the frigate, you know, and he might redeem himself by brave service."

"That's so, sir, and his old father would be glad, for he had a heap of love for the boy."

"Do you know any one on the ship who knew young Vernon?"

"No, sir, not one."

"You do not think there is any one, then, who knows him?"

"I am sure there is not, sir."

Officer Manly now returned to the deck to his duties, while Captain Lonsdale muttered:

"He is safe, at least as far as any of the crew go."

"Now to see him, when Manly goes off duty, for I would do nothing now to draw the old man's suspicion upon him, though I do not fear Robert Manly would betray him."

CHAPTER XV.

THE SPITFIRE'S LIEUTENANT.

"BRANDY!"

"Ay, ay, massa."

"Ask Lieutenant Harold to come to my cabin."

"Yes, sir."

Brandy disappeared on his errand, and soon after the young officer, who had been lieutenant of the Spitfire, put in an appearance.

He was a striking-looking man, scarcely over twenty-four, and yet with a face that gave him the appearance of being older.

Of splendid physique and the easy air of one born in refinement, clad in the new uniform which the frigate's tailor had made for him, he was certainly a personage whom, in appearance, no vessel need be ashamed to own as an officer.

"You sent for me, Captain Lonsdale?" he said, politely.

"Yes, be seated, please, Mr. Harold."

The lieutenant obeyed, and Lonsdale asked:

"How is the frigate doing, sir?"

"As well as ship can do, sir."

"She is a splendid boat, Captain Lonsdale, and blow light or heavy, she goes well."

"And how do you like her working?"

"Very much, sir."

"Her rig is satisfactory?"

"Wholly so, captain."

"And in action what would you think of her?"

"A splendid boat under all circumstances, sir, in spite of the name she has."

"You like her battery?"

"It is splendid, sir."

"And her crew?"

"All you need, sir, is a fight to show their worth."

"Then nothing is needed but the enemy, Harold?" said Lonsdale, with a smile.

"That is all, sir."

"Do the men fear her now, as a haunted craft?"

"Well, sir, if we were worsted in a fight, and had to run for it, I fear the men would give trouble, thinking the craft was doomed to ill fortune; but they have great confidence in you, sir, and they both love and fear you."

"I am glad to hear that."

"If you whip your first test battle, sir, the men will be your slaves, from officers down, and I for one, feel assured that this frigate can better any French craft in these waters."

"There are some pretty large French frigates here on this coast, Mr. Harold?"

"True, sir, but you have a splendid craft here, a devoted crew, and what is more, we have a commander whom we implicitly trust, and why not, when you have done for the convicts all you have, saved some from death, others from a life in prison."

"You kept the pirates from the yard-arm, and what you have done for me, Heaven bless you for," and the young officer spoke with deep emotion.

"You deserved all I have done for you, Har-

old, for the bold manner in which you faced that red-handed pirate chief of yours, to save my sister from captivity."

"I could not stand by and see him harm her, sir."

"You risked your life to protect her."

"And what was my life then?—a pirate's!"

"Well, Mr. Harold, it is different for you now, and you can win honor, and when I go into Boston I shall speak to Admiral Fenton in your behalf."

Lionel Lonsdale was looking straight in the face of the young officer, and he saw him start at his words.

Then came the question:

"Are you going to Boston, sir?"

"I hope to some day."

"Captain Lonsdale?"

"Well, Mr. Harold?"

"Will you do me a favor?"

"Certainly."

"When you capture a prize, I suppose you will take it into Boston?"

"Yes, if it is one worthy of so doing."

"Well, sir, the favor I have to ask is, that you will not speak to Admiral Fenton about me, and will be good enough to allow me to keep my state-room on the plea of sickness, while you are in port."

"Why shall I do this, Harold?"

"I cannot answer you, sir, and yet I would like to."

"Some day I may, but not now, sir, not now, or you may think as ill of me as others do."

"You shall do as you like in the matter, Mr. Harold; but by the way, have you not lost something of value, something bearing your full name engraven upon it, and—"

"God have mercy! I have lost my locket!" and the face of the young officer became livid.

"Be not alarmed, my friend, for here is the locket you seek."

"Oh, sir, where did you find it?" and the red blood rushed into the face of the young officer, while his eyes flashed with joy.

"Brandy picked it up about the ship and brought it to me."

"And you saw the name upon it, sir?"

"Yes, for I supposed at first it was a stoler trinket, dropped by some of the pirate crew."

"Seeing the name, I recalled you first to mind, for I knew at once whom it was the likeness in the locket resembled, and more, your name, that I know you by, is Harold."

"Then you know me now, sir?"

"Yes."

"Will you keep my secret, and let my existence on this ship remain a secret?"

"Yes."

"Captain Lonsdale, you place me under an obligation that I can never repay," and the young officer held out his hand, which Lionel Lonsdale grasped warmly, while he said:

"Remember, Harold, I know of your alleged crime, but, meeting you as I have done, I will not condemn until I hear your story."

"Now, here is your locket, and be careful not to lose it again."

"Now, where are we?"

"About ten leagues off the port I dare not go into," said the young officer, with a sad smile.

"Then head toward port until we can see if there are any Frenchmen lurking along the coast."

"Yes, sir," and Lieutenant Harold went on deck, and half an hour after Lionel Lonsdale heard the cry of the lookout:

"Sail ho!"

"Whereaway?" asked Harold, who was on deck.

"Dead ahead, sir."

A moment after again came the cry:

"Sail ho!"

"Where now, my man?"

"Dead ahead, sir, as the other one lies."

"Ay, ay."

As Harold was about to report the sails to Captain Lonsdale, that person suddenly appeared on deck.

CHAPTER XVI.

AGAINST BIG ODDS.

WHEN Lionel Lonsdale appeared on deck, the sails sighted from the mast-head were not visible from the quarter-deck, and so, taking his best glass he went up into the rigging.

Standing where he could see both vessels, with the naked eye, he turned his glass upon one and then the other, and his gaze was a long and careful one.

Then he descended to the deck, and Lieutenant Harold felt that he had made some discovery.

"Mr. Harold?"

"Yes, captain."

"Those vessels are Frenchmen."

"I expected as much, sir."

"They are a frigate and a sloop-of-war."

"It is a pity the frigate is not alone."

"I shall fight them both, Mr. Harold."

The officer looked surprised.

"They are off the port, sir, where I expected some Frenchman would be cruising, and it would be a great feather in our cap to whip them both."

"It would indeed, sir."

"I think it would gain a pardon for my convicts, ay, and my pirates, too."

"I hope so, sir."

"One, I am sure, is the fine British sloop-of-war *Rajah*, which I heard ran into the midst of a French fleet in a fog and was taken a short while ago."

"Her crew were kept on board, so I heard, and she was manned from the fleet and sent on a cruise."

"It would be a great thing, sir, to recapture her; but I only wish there were not two of them."

"Mr. Harold, if we whip both, so much the greater honor."

"I have men on board this vessel who need to do some great deed to save them from the gallows and imprisonment."

"Yonder is their chance, and I shall put my crew to the test, for I will fight both the frigate and the sloop."

"If I did not feel that, under the circumstances, there was a chance in our favor, even against big odds, I would not fight; but I believe we can win, and if not, we can run away, though never will I give the order to retreat out of action as long as there is one atom of hope of victory."

"I am at your service, Captain Lonsdale, to sink or swim, sir."

"I am not one to say die until hope has fled."

"I believe you, Harold."

"Now, get the vessel quietly in trim, and see that nothing is wanting."

"When all is ready, I will say a word to the crew."

An hour after Lionel Lonsdale again came on deck. The two Frenchmen were distinctly visible now, and they were slowly standing down to meet the British frigate.

Land was in plain view, and the distant town could be seen from the quarter-deck.

"Mr. Harold."

"Yes, sir."

Lonsdale had carefully taken in the situation, and after having a look at the skies, continued:

"Put the frigate away."

"Not to fight, sir?"

"Not just yet, for I wish to appear to run from them."

"Ay, ay, sir."

The frigate's course was accordingly changed, and instantly the two French vessels, which had been under easy canvas, began to crowd on sail in chase.

The wind was off-shore, and blowing about six knots.

Just what their captain meant to do, the officers and crew, with one exception, could not understand, for somehow he did not seem to be running from the enemy in earnest.

Presently officer Harold said:

"I think, sir, you are doing just what I would like to suggest; for, having sailed under Captain Cutlass, I have learned many tricks, such as pirates study."

Lonsdale turned to him with a smile and answered:

"I had an idea you understood what I was aiming at."

"May I explain, sir?"

"Certainly."

"You wish to draw the Frenchmen off-shore, getting them into a certain position by dark?"

"Yes."

"Then you believe, as will doubtless be the case, a stiff wind will come in from the sea, killing the present off-shore breeze, and that will put you to windward."

"Right, and what then?"

"You will run for port, and fight them as near the entrance as possible, so if compelled to retreat, you can run the gantlet and get under the guns of the fort."

"You have divined my plan correctly, Harold, but it is growing twilight now, so we will begin to act."

"In a short while we will have the wind of those fellows, for see, the land breeze is already dying out."

Darkness soon came upon the sea, and then the moon arose and spread its silvery light over the waters.

With the rising of the moon the land breeze died out, but ere it did so the frigate was put about, and as the wind came in from the ocean, her sails filled and she glided swiftly along.

She had gained the windward by the clever maneuvering of her young captain, and more, she was in a position to run into port, if she so wished, as she had the wind blowing good and strong half an hour almost before her enemies felt it.

Then they had to wear around, and the crew of the *Ill Omen* felt that their young commander could now run to port in safety, or fight as he deemed best.

They hoped it would be the latter.

CHAPTER XVII. THE FATAL FRIGATE.

THAT his crew wanted to fight, Lionel Lonsdale could see.

And more, he was sure that they had perfect confidence in him, and were anxious to try the frigate.

"Mr. Harold?"

"Yes, sir."

"Have the men had much to say of late about the ghost of the *Ill Omen*?"

"They regard the vessel as haunted, sir, and in fact no one can doubt it who has seen the ghost."

"You have seen her?"

"Yes, sir, and all of the men, without exception."

"And what do they think?"

"That it is the daughter of the English captain, who died on board with the scourge, at the time she was a prison-ship."

"But they do not seem to fear the ghost?"

"They are not anxious to crowd her, sir, when they see her taking her midnight walks."

"No. I suppose she has the deck mostly to herself on such occasions."

"Yes, sir; but then the boys call her what you said she would prove, the Guardian Spirit of the Frigate, and they wish to see the result of a fight."

"If we win, they would rather have the ghost on board than not."

"What do you think, Lieutenant Harold?"

"Of the ghost, sir?"

"Yes."

"I was brought up, sir, not to be superstitious, and was told there were no such things as spooks and spirits, but—"

"But—"

"But I confess the ghost of the *Ill Omen* staggers me, as well as does the ill-fated history of this craft."

"Then you would rather sail in a vessel that was not haunted?"

"I'll answer better, sir, after our fight with the Frenchmen, when I see what our Guardian Spirit of the ship has done for us," was the smiling rejoinder.

"Please call the men to quarters, sir," said Lionel Lonsdale as he walked away.

The drum-beat to quarters at once rung through the ship, and the crew sprung with alacrity to obey the call.

The ship was stripped for action, to the surprise of the Frenchmen, who had deemed her anxiously running for port.

That she meant to fight them had not entered the heads of their respective commanders.

The moon shone brightly, a fair breeze was blowing, the sea was smooth, and the position of the combatants had changed from what it had been a few hours before.

Now, if so he wished, there would be little doubt of Captain Lonsdale's running into port without much damage being done him.

But that he did not so wish the crew of the *Ill Omen* were thoroughly convinced.

As the two Frenchmen saw their enemy drawing nearer they too stripped for action and their crews were called to their guns.

"Men, I have been anxious, having taken the responsibility of freeing you from your prison life, and saving others from death on the gallows, and at the yard-arm, to secure a pardon for your past offenses, and make you once more free men."

"Yonder are our foes, and the larger one is more than a match for this vessel under ordinary circumstances, for I recognize her as one of the finest frigates in the French Navy, while the sloop-of-war is also a formidable foe."

"I shall head so that I wish you to devote the starboard broadside to the frigate, and the larboard* to the sloop-of-war."

"Whip these two Frenchmen and you secure your pardons, my word for it."

"Some of you must fall, but you die in honor, on the deck of a king's vessel and beneath the flag of Great Britain."

"If I decide to board the frigate I wish you, crew of the *Spitfire*, to follow me."

"Now do your duty, and if I see a coward on my deck I shall swing him up to the yard arm in the faces of the Frenchmen."

A wild cheer, not such as would have been given by British tars on the deck of a man-of-war, but a yell that was appalling, broke from the crew of the *Ill Omen* that reached the ears of their foes.

"Ho, there, at the starboard guns."

"Let her off, helmsmen!"

"Steady! starboard broadside, fire!"

The recoil of the guns made the frigate reel, and the iron messengers of death went flying along upon their mission to kill and crashed into the stout hull of the Frenchman.

The wounded frigate reeled under the deadly blow, but her brave commander ordered a return broadside.

Ere it could be given the port broadside of the *Ill Omen* was poured upon the sloop-of-war, and both French vessels got a blow before they could deal one.

But the sloop also rallied and the firing became hot and fast.

As the daring enemy approached them the Frenchmen were amazed at the recklessness of her commander and the accuracy of her aim, and they felt that they must fight hard to win, even against a single foe.

Nearer and nearer the combatants drew to—

* Now changed to "port."—THE AUTHOR.

gether, the British frigate heading as though to pass between her foes, which narrowed the space to prevent it.

Yet, to maneuver and to deliver their broadsides, they were compelled to keep a considerable distance apart.

That the Englishman meant to pass between them seemed assured from the course she held, and the fire of the Frenchmen was terrific in an endeavor to cripple their foe ere he could do so.

The guns of the Frenchmen roared continuously, while the *Ill Omen* fired only in broadsides, first one and then the other; but the effect was most deadly.

Nearer and nearer she drew running dead before the wind, while her enemies had to beat to windward and were frequently upon opposite tacks.

Suddenly, as all expected the *Ill Omen* to pass between the two French vessels, her course was quickly changed and, ere the sloop could avoid it, as she and her consort were both on the starboard tack, the bows of the English vessel swung round at the quick order of her commander, and she was thrown thereby off the port bow of the smaller vessel.

Then her port broadside was poured upon the sloop, and wearing around quickly, while she held her small foe between herself and the large frigate, she gave her the starboard broadside at close range.

It was more than the sloop could stand, and while her foremast came down with a crash, and her bowsprit was cut off short, there came the cry on board in French:

"I surrender, monsieur!"

"Ay, ay, monsieur, remain where you are until I board you," was the response of Lionel Lonsdale in perfect French, as the *Ill Omen* shot ahead, now on the starboard tack with the French frigate, which had feared to fire, on account of the danger of hitting the sloop.

CHAPTER XVIII.

"BOARDERS AHOY!"

As the wild cheer of the crew of the *Ill Omen*, at the surrender of the sloop-of-war, ceased, the stern command rung out:

"Now, lads, for the battle of the giants!"

"Starboard broadside! fire!"

The entire guns to starboard were discharged, almost as one, and they went crashing into the Frenchman, and with severe damage.

But the French frigate was a superb vessel, and her crew were anxious to redeem the loss of the sloop, and regain her by whipping their daring foe.

As soon as the broadside had been fired, quick came the order to let the *Ill Omen* wear round before the wind, and when the French guns belched forth in a broadside, the iron balls sped through the smoke, but the English frigate was not there, and, to their surprise, they got another broadside from astern that very nearly raked the vessel from stem to stern.

After firing this second broadside, Lionel Lonsdale headed directly after the French frigate, determined to come to closer quarters, for he had seen that he could outsail the enemy easily.

The Frenchman now stood on the port tack, to avoid being raked, and poured his broadside upon the *Ill Omen*, hoping to rake her from stem to stern.

But the masterly manner in which the young captain handled his vessel prevented this, as the *Ill Omen* went about with the Frenchman, and more quickly, so that her broadside was delivered more quickly.

The deck of the *Ill Omen* was now an appalling sight.

Several of her guns had been dismantled, her bulwarks were torn, her decks seamed, her lower sails almost in tatters, and some of her spars cut in twain and swinging by the stays.

Though gashed in many places, her masts and bowsprit still stood firm, and she minded her helm with the quickness that she was remarkable for.

But, saddest of all, from stem to stern, above and below decks, her crew had suffered terribly, and the dead and dying lay in heaps, while many a man suffering from no slight wound, stood at his post of duty and fought on.

"We are in a bad plight, men, but one Frenchman has struck, and the other shall soon," shouted Lionel Lonsdale, in a voice that rung through the ship.

But a cheer greeted his words, and the guns now roared savagely as they were turned upon the frigate.

"Point closer, helmsman, for I shall board her on this tack if possible!"

"Ay, ay, sir," and as one of the helmsmen spoke, he and his comrade fell dead at their post.

"I have the wheel, sir," said a quiet voice, as Lionel Lonsdale sprung toward it.

"Ah, Harold, it is you! but I will call for quartermasters to relieve you, as I shall board, and wish you to go with me."

"Ay ay, sir, I am ready," was the calm response.

Two more quartermasters came running to

the wheel, at the call of their captain, and then came the thrilling cry:

"Boarders ahoy!"

"Spitfires, I want you!"

A wild yell in chorus came from the pirate contingent of the crew, as they crowded together after their young captain, and cutlasses were waved with frantic gestures.

"Marines ahoy!"

"Ay, ay, sir!" answered the captain of marines.

"Sweep the Frenchman's decks with your musketry, as I give the order to lay the frigate aboard the Frenchman."

"Ay, ay, Captain Lonsdale."

Then came the order, the two splendid vessels being at pistol range from each other, running side by side, the *Ill Omen* to leeward.

"Starboard broadside, fire!"

The recoil and the shock were appalling.

But above the roar came the tones, clear as bugle notes:

"Lay her alongside, helmsmen!"

"Ay, ay, sir!"

"Marines ahoy! fire!"

The muskets rattled forth, and as the bows of the *Ill Omen* swept up in the wind there came a crash that shook both vessels to the center, grappnels were thrown from either deck, and Lionel Lonsdale and his lieutenant sprung on board the Frenchman, their pirate crew at their backs.

The fire of the marines had staggered the Frenchmen, then came the crash of the two vessels and the *Ill Omen's* broadside, and next the flying forms of the pirates boarding.

In vain they strive to stem the tide, while the heavy guns of the two vessels made huge gaps in the stout hulls.

The charge of the pirates was irresistible, for many a deck had they thus sprung upon and swept, and they but too well understood their red work.

Followed by others, the stream of humanity seemed unending to the Frenchmen; their captain and many officers had been killed, their decks were full of wreckage and of dead and dying men, and they cried in piteous tones for quarter.

"Hold!"

"Mercy is asked for—it shall be shown!" came in the well-known voice of Lionel Lonsdale, as he sprung toward the peak balliards, hauled down the French colors and sent up in their place the British ensign.

The fight was won. The *Ill Omen* had indeed proven to be a *Fatal Frigate*!

CHAPTER XIX.

CAPTAIN CUTLASS AT WORK.

WHEN the One-Armed Buccaneer fired upon his shipmate, Bonus, he did just what he had determined upon from the first.

He had used the man to escape from prison, where, when well enough, he would be hanged for piracy, and he had bribed the unfortunate guard by giving him jewels which to the poor fellow would realize a fortune, and thus enable him to carry out the dream of his life—to buy a little home and marry the girl he loved.

But Captain Cutlass was a man who held no mercy in his heart, and gratitude was unknown in the make-up of his composition, or he would never have forced the young sailor, Harold, who had saved him from the yard-arm, to become his lieutenant.

As long as Bonus had been useful to him he had kept him with him, for, one-handed and alone, he could never have made the run down the coast in the little smack.

But when he came in sight of the place where he knew he could get aid, he had quickly taken the man's life, as has been seen.

His shot was a deadly one, and when he stepped to the tiller he leant over and took from the body of his victim the money and jewels he carried.

Then he let the body remain there, while he headed the boat in toward the shore.

There was an inlet through the narrow stretch of sand, and passing into this, the pirate headed toward a wooded point of land.

As he neared it he saw that he was observed from the shore by several men, who were standing among the large pines, holding rifles in their hands.

The buccaneer knew his men, and that they were a hardy, reckless set, hunters, fishers and timbermen, but at the same time ready to put their hands to any work that came handy, whether it was honest or not.

Once he had sought shelter in the little bay, turning in at night through the inlet, when he was hemmed in outside by two vessels-of-war.

The men of the wild settlement had sided with him, though he was known to be a corsair, and his vessel had been taken to a retreat which the war-craft could not find.

In return, Captain Cutlass had been most liberal with the people who had saved him, not from a spirit of gratitude or generosity, but for future advantage.

Several times he had run into the little bay and given them presents, feeling that the day

might come when he would need their services.

At last that day had come, and he had used Bonus to bring him in sight of the settlement, and then had coolly shot him.

As he rounded the point of timber and glided into an anchorage not visible from the sea, the men came down to the shore, and several sprung into a skiff and rowed out to the smack, as Captain Cutlass ran up into the wind and, going forward, let fall the anchor.

"Why, it's you, after all, cap'n!" cried one of the men, as he sprung on board the smack.

"Yes, Chief Wilder, I am back again to see you, but I do not come in my schooner."

"So I see, cap'n; but we thought you might be Government officers, hiding below decks and ready for us, as they says we smuggle a little," and the man laughed.

"Oh, no, you would not be so wicked; but see, I have lost an arm, I may say, for my right hand is gone."

He held up the stump, as he spoke, which Bonus had skillfully dressed twice a day since they set sail.

"Fact, cap'n; but what's it all about?"

"The king's men caught me, got my schooner, I was wounded and went to jail, and I escaped. See that chap?" and he pointed to the body.

"Yes; he's dead."

"Very."

"What kilt him?"

"Lead."

"I see, run ag'in' a bullet?"

"He tried to rob me, when I told him I had friends inshore."

"I see."

"I engaged him to bring me here, and he knew I had a little money with me, and so thought he'd get it and go back."

"But I killed him."

"Now you did."

"But, cap'n, come ashore and take pot-luck in my cabin, while the boys will be glad to see you, and the women and children too, for they hain't forgot the presents you gave 'em."

"Thank you, Chief Wilder. I will accept your hospitality for a day or two."

"Hain't going so soon?"

"Yes."

"Must?"

"Yes, for I have work ahead."

"You is gen'rally busy."

"I wish to propose something to you, too, Wilder."

"I'm open for business, cap'n, if it pays."

"Very well, we'll talk it over to-night, for I want to have you go with me."

"No, now?"

"I do."

"Will it pay?"

"Immensely."

"I'm your man, cap'n."

"And I shall want a crew too."

"For the smack?"

"No, for my schooner."

"Thought you said she was nabbed."

"I did, but I intend to get her back, or a better one," was the significant reply.

"That's good talk; but what shall I do with this?" and the man kicked the body of the false guard.

"Pitch it into the sea."

"I'll search him first."

"I have done that, and he had but little."

"You can give it to your children," and the pirate handed out a few pieces of gold.

"Thank you, cap'n, for the little ones."

"Now here goes," and the body was tossed overboard.

CHAPTER XX.

THE COAST GYPSIES.

HAVING gotten rid of the body of Bonus, and Chief Wilder—as the man was called, who had boarded the smack—putting things shipshape on board, the pirate got into the skiff alongside and was taken on shore.

Back among the pines was the camp, or settlement of the wild people, who had become known as "Coast Gypsies," from the strange life they led.

There were half a hundred cabins grouped together, well-built and comfortable.

In the rear of the cabins some distance, was a clearing, where vegetables, were planted, and the cabins and the garden were the whole visible belongings of the people who dwelt there.

They called themselves hunters and fishermen, and were went to take both fish and game to the markets along the coast.

They dressed furs also, made fancy baskets, and floor-matting of fine straw, and such was their stock in trade.

There were those who said they met smuggling vessels off the coast, and run their cargoes in, while others believed them little better than pirates.

But still nothing had been proven against them as a class, though individuals of their number had now and then been caught in illegal acts.

They had a chief, and his word was law over the half thousand souls who composed the settlement, and which consisted of women and children, as well as men.

They were a powerfully-built, wild-looking set of men, could all swim like a Sandwich Islander, were natural sailors, dead shots and fearless.

They had a score of small vessels, which, if they wished to change their dwelling, they could bundle the whole tribe on board and sail where they chose.

But they generally settled within a day's sail of some seaport of importance, to find a market for their wares.

The cabin of Chief Wilder was no better than the rest, though it was larger, and had an assembly room in it.

As he passed along, the pirate was greeted by the people, who all recognized him from his former visits, and his generosity on those occasions.

Arriving at his cabin Chief Wilder sent for the "medicine-man" of the settlement, to look after the arm of his pirate friend, and an old man came who certainly did give the wounded outlaw much relief from the pain he had been suffering.

After supper the chief said bluntly:

"Now, cap'n, what can the Coast Gypsies do for you?"

"I wish to do for them as well."

"Granted; but first, what do you want?"

"How many men have you in camp?"

"Just six hundred and one people, and three hundred and sixty are males over eighteen."

"You could then spare seventy-five good fellows and they would not be missed?"

"What for?"

"I wish to go to my Island Retreat."

"In the Bahamas?"

"Yes."

"Well, what then?"

"I have there a dozen men, but mostly crippled or old."

"I see."

"They keep the stores I have on the island, and it is a retreat I must have when I need to fit out; but of late the war-vessels have dogged me so I have not been there for months."

"I understand."

"For this reason I ran north with my schooner, which was in wretched condition, determined to capture me another craft."

"And missed it?"

"I did."

"Well?"

"I captured a schooner, just what I wanted, but she was taken from me by a frigate, the one they call the *Fatal Frigate*, of which you have heard."

"Yes, I have heard her spoken of as a haunted craft."

"She is."

"And she took your schooner?"

"Yes, and my prize."

"Too bad."

"So I came here to get some of you men to go with me in my smack to the Bahamas retreat."

"I see."

"There I have a merchant brig in fair condition, and she has on board a cargo of woods from South American countries, and was bound to England."

"But I'll run her here, get the number of men I need from you, and sail for Boston."

"Once in the harbor I'll sell the cargo and brig, cut out my schooner by night, for she is being put in splendid trim by her captors, and then I'll be afloat once more."

"I see."

"You can spare me the men?"

"That depends."

"Upon what?"

"Terms."

"I will give you the rank of first lieutenant."

"No, I'm an honest man, and I'm leader here, captain."

"What terms do you wish?"

"I'll put the crew against you and the schooner, and share even on all prizes."

"These are hard terms, Wilder."

"Then get a crew elsewhere."

"No, I know your men are the best."

"Then pay for them, for mind you, officers whom you may appoint, and all, turn their share into our Gypsy treasury, and we all share alike."

"That's our little law, and the man of this settlement, or woman, or child either, who breaks it, knows what the penalty is."

"And that penalty?"

"Death."

"Very well, I agree to your terms, and I will need a dozen men to go with me on the smack."

"You can have them; but when will you need your full crew?"

"In about three weeks, or withing the month, upon my return."

"They will be ready for you."

"Seventy-five will do."

"You can have all you wish, cap'n, and they will be men you can trust, while they are as good sailors as ever set foot on a deck."

"I do not doubt that."

"But what about the loss of your right hand?"

"Fortunately, I use one hand as well as the other, while I can wield a cutlass and shoot with my left also; but I shall begin practicing with a blade and pistols at once, for *I shall need to*," was the rejoinder.

CHAPTER XXI.

THE OUTLAWS' RETREAT.

AMONG the many islands, keys, rocks, reefs and sand-banks, which go to make up that strange archipelago, the Bahamas, are a number of secure retreats which, in olden times, yes, and down among the "eighteen-thirties," were used as hiding-places for buccaneers.

It required in the long ago good management to sail through the Bahamas, in rough weather, and there were many localities there where a sailor did not care to be, either in good or foul seas.

Scenes of the island can be pointed out to-day, as the home of buccaneers during the last century, and in the early part of this one.

With a retreat where few dared follow him, and only the most skillful pilot would dare venture in bad weather, the daring pirate was wont to deal havoc upon the shipping up and down the American coast of the Atlantic, and among the West Indies, feeling that he could always retreat to his rendezvous to lie hidden and divide his spoils.

It was in one of the most secluded islands of the Bahamas that the Cuban Corsair, as the one-armed outlaw had been more generally known, had his retreat.

While there was a sail in sight he never would go near that retreat, for he would do nothing to lead any one upon him in his hiding.

Then, too, his island rendezvous could only be reached at the full tide.

It was an island in shape not unlike a wedge, with a rocky cliff at one end and a sandy point at the other.

A fourth of a mile in length, it was a thousand feet wide at the cliff end, and arose to a considerable height.

A dreary-looking rock in appearance, it yet, from the center to the cliff end, was overgrown with a growth of hardy trees, twisted out of all shape in their growing, by the fierce winds that had swept over the island.

To one coming near, and in the maintop, what appeared to be a lake could be seen at the lower end of the island, and long and narrow in shape; but that there was any means of entering it from the sea no one could have believed.

It is to this island I would now have my reader accompany me, or rather to the deck of a small sloop that is heading for it.

The sloop is the same that left Boston, carrying on her deck the unlucky Bonus, and the One-Armed Pirate.

Upon her decks are a dozen men, all gazing toward the island with interest, while at the tiller stands the crippled corsair himself.

"I can see no way of getting in to that island, captain," said a young man, with a dark face, stamped with daring and determination.

"You will only see when the tide is high enough for us to go in, and not then until we are passing through the sand shoals," was the reply.

And off and on the little vessel stood, waiting for the tide to run full.

At last some of the sand shoals on the point disappeared, and then the prow was pointed for the island.

It required a steady hand to shave the shoals, as the sloop had to do; but Captain Cutlass edged around the sand-banks near enough to spring from the deck upon them, and then headed in toward the rocky point.

At high tide as it was, all could see that the supposed lake was then connected with the sea, and the sloop glided into it, with no sail set, under the pressure of the strong current.

There was ample depth within the basin, and as the sloop was swept on the rocky shores upon either side rose higher than the mast, and still further on the growth of trees would conceal a man-of-war, with her topmasts housed.

As though intended by nature for a pirate hiding-place, the basin within the island, curved in the shape of an L, thus affording a safe retreat for vessels, after rounding the curve.

But, until the bend was rounded, a vessel could be seen far and near on either side.

The shores of the basin were wild and rocky, but there was depth for a good anchorage, and no wind could reach a craft there with force enough to do it harm.

Upon the hillsides, covered with the growth of trees alluded to, were several cabins, built mostly of ships' timbers and wreckage, while upon a rock, that served well as a wharf, was a larger structure, a store-house for piratical booty.

Amid a clump of pines was another cabin of better appearance than the others, and which had a real comfortable, cosy look.

A shed in front served as a piazza, once the rock floor, and here, seated on a rustic chair, was a woman, regarding with interest the coming in of the sloop.

"Yes, it is Murel, and he has lost his schooner, that is certain."

"But the Virgin be praised that he is spared."

"I will meet him at the store-house wharf."

She arose as she spoke and walked down a path leading to the larger cabin already spoken of.

CHAPTER XXII.

A PIRATE'S WIFE.

THE woman who was on the Pirate Isle had the dark face, slender form and glorious eyes of a Cuban.

She was dressed richly, for her attire was of the finest materials, and strangely out of place there; but then she had the choice of her toilet from a store that seemed inexhaustible.

Then she wore rare jewels worth a king's ransom.

Her face was touching in its sadness, but very lovely, and in years she could scarcely be beyond twenty-five.

As the little sloop glided alongside the rocky shelf that served as a wharf, there was a motley gang there to receive it.

Cubans, Indians, negroes, and a few whites, among whom were English, Irish, French and Portuguese.

Altogether there were a score, with a few negroes in the party.

Some of the men had their heads bound up, as from wounds, others were lame and used rude crutches, several carried their arms in a sling, and two were minus an arm and a leg.

They gave a cheer as they beheld their chief spring ashore, but they looked anxious when they saw that he had lost his right hand, and came back without his schooner, and with strange men.

In the basin were several vessels at anchor, from a small Cuban *goleta* to a brig of three hundred tons.

Pointing to the latter, the chief said:

"Lads, I am back again, having lost my schooner and crew."

"But I have another crew, and yonder brig shall win a fine vessel and be the means thereby of securing greater riches."

Then he passed on up the hillside, to where the woman stood, her face now pale, as she saw that he had but one arm.

"Oh, Murel! my husband! you are wounded," she cried anxiously, as she threw her arms about him.

"Marcelite, I have come back to you without a vessel or a crew, and with my good right hand gone, as you see."

"But the future is before me, and I will triumph over my foes and win revenge."

"But come, let us walk to the cabin, and tell Duena to come and cook me one of her good suppers, for I am very hungry."

"Hast been well, Marcelite?"

"Yes, I am always well you know, my one illness being lonesomeness, Murel."

"Well, you will not be lonesome now for a week, Marcelite, as I will be here with you."

"Just think of it, my wife, I will be here one whole week."

"And away three whole months."

"Ah, Murel, it is not often that I see you now, but I will call Duena and have her prepare supper, and you can tell me how it is that I see you thus crippled, and with no vessel."

She placed a silver whistle to her lips as she spoke, and giving three sharp blasts, it was answered by a musical call:

"Coming, senora, coming," and a mulattress left the crowd on the rock and came rapidly up the hill toward the cabin of her mistress.

Duena was dressed in a picturesque, if not a fashionable costume, and seemed to be fond of showy attire.

She was a handsome mulattress of forty years of age, and as quick in her movements as a child.

She greeted the pirate chief politely, and then set to work to get supper, calling a half-grown negro lad to her aid to make a fire and bring wood and water.

In the mean time the buccaneer had thrown himself upon a comfortable settee, which had once adorned the cabin of one of his prizes, and the young wife sat near him.

"How have matters gone since I left, Marcelite?" he asked.

"As usual."

"No trouble with the people?"

"None that I could not quell," was the quiet response.

After a moment of silence she asked:

"Tell me how you lost your hand and your schooner."

"But of course I mourn most for the loss of your hand."

"It was the work of that handsome lieutenant, whom you always liked."

"What, of Harold?"

"The same."

"He certainly did not turn traitor?"

"I think so, though you might think not."

"I would not defend him in an act of wrong, Murel, though I did feel sorry that he was forced to lead a life of outlawry, when he was so well fitted to occupy a far different position."

"And I?"

"You know how I have longed to get you out of this wild, sinful life."

"Well, we will be able to soon, if my plans go well."

"How so?"

"I told you that Harold did this."

"Yes."

"He is a very devil when aroused."

"And he cut your hand off?"

"Yes, in square fight, though."

"And you with your cutlass?"

"Yes."

"I am surprised."

"So was I; but I captured a schooner, which I meant to take for my vessel, as the Spitfire was sadly in need of repairs, and in the vessel, which was a coasting packet out of Boston, there was a young lady of vast riches."

"I meant to hold her for ransom, but Harold took her part, and while we were seeing who should rule, a frigate came up and captured me."

"I was sent in irons to prison, but got away, and my vessel is a prize; but I shall soon have her back."

"How can you?"

"Well, the frigate's commander is an old foe, who has chased me often, and I have longed for revenge, and now I shall have it."

"I cannot see how."

"It was his sister who was passenger on board the packet, and he is also engaged to a young lady of vast wealth."

"I shall capture both maidens, bring them here, and here they shall remain until I get my price for them."

"Oh, Murel!"

"With that money and what I have, I will be able to lead a different life, and we will go somewhere and find a home, Marcelite, and spend the rest of our days in luxury and happiness."

"Can we, with the grim specters of the past to haunt us?"

"Yes, for I will live for the present, hope for the future and bury the past."

"Ah, me! if I only could; but why not carry out your good resolve now, Murel?"

"I have not riches enough."

"Ah, Murel, you are very rich!"

"I will be, after my next cruise; but, Marcelite, I will remain here a week to fit the brig out, and then sail in her."

"Within two months I hope to be back with my captives, so I shall have a cabin built near this one for them, and you shall be their guard."

The pirate's wife sighed but made no reply, though a deep shadow fell upon her heart.

CHAPTER XXIII.

A STRANGE BRIG.

THE days passed at his retreat by the pirate were spent in trying to get his arm perfectly well and in fitting out the brig for sea.

It was a craft of three hundred tons burden, loaded with costly South American woods, and had laid in the basin since her capture, nearly a year before.

But she was overhauled, painted and rigged out with better canvas.

The Cuban Corsair also passed a couple of hours of each day in fencing with his left hand.

The young Coast Gypsy, Leon, was a good swordsman, and he exercised with him, and also practiced shooting, until he began to feel that he was becoming a dangerous man to engage in combat, and just were his views upon this subject, and not imagination.

At last the day was set for sailing, and he had put on board a quantity of booty, intending to dispose of it somewhere, so that he felt he would have money enough to get, for the new schooner, or for his own if he cut the Spitfire out, all that was needed without drawing upon his jewels, for the buccaneer prized them as he did his heart's blood, and never cared to part with them.

He was seated in the cabin with his wife, waiting for the tide to come in full, so that he could get out with the brig, when it began first to ebb, and a frown was upon his face, for Marcelite had asked him not to bring his intended captives there to the retreat.

"You are a silly fool, Marcelite," he said.

"Perhaps I am."

"I know you are."

"Humor me then."

"And not capture those two maidens?"

"Yes."

"I cannot do it."

"For my sake?"

"No."

"Poor girls, they will pine here, and oh! how unhappy they will be."

"They will be ransomed."

"You are rich enough, Murel."

"I have not enough."

"Ah! Murel, you have a far greater sum than falls to man's lot often."

"I want more."

"Give up taking those ladies captive."

"No."

"I beseech you, Murel."

"Why?"

"Well, I do not care to have them here."

"You are jealous."

"Call it so if you wish, but do not bring them here."

"I cannot gratify your wish, Marcelite, for I have nowhere else to take them."

"Leave them where they are."

"And my revenge?"

"You have no reason for revenge, for the frigate's commander was doing his duty."

"I am revengeful though, and, as he ruined me, I shall seek revenge."

"I can say no more, Murel."

"I am glad you will not."

"See, the water has covered the tide-rock, and will turn in a few minutes."

"I must be off, so bid me good-by, wife, and remember, that within a few months I no longer sweep the seas as a buccaneer."

"The Virgin grant your words prove true."

"All will come well, *cara mia*, so good-by!"

He kissed her affectionately, and nodding to Duena, said:

"Take good care of my wife, Duena."

The mulattress bowed, but made no reply, and Marcelite running after him, went down to the shore by his side.

The brig had been already swung round, her bows pointing to the sea, and she was moved alongside the wharf rock.

"Good-by again, Marcelite," and he sprang on board.

"Good-by, Murel."

She spoke in a tone of deep sadness, and going back to her cabin, watched the brig drift out with the tide.

There was a point of lookout on the island, the summit of a tower-shaped rock, and ships' ratlines had been made fast to the top.

Upon this rock a man stood, his vision sweeping the horizon with a glass.

To this rock Marcelite went, and seeing her the lookout said:

"No vessel in sight, senora."

"I will watch, Adolpho, so come down."

The man did so, and the woman ascended the ratlines to the top.

It was a breezy place, but the rock had been hollowed out, so that she could sit there and her head merely be on a level with the edge, did she so wish, and it would afford a hiding-place for one on watch there, from any passing vessel, the ratlines going up on the side where they were not visible from the sea.

But Marcelite stood up within the hollow of the rock, and waved her sash to the receding brig.

Some of the crew saw her and attracted their captain's attention, and he raised his hat, while in his clear voice came to her ears, even at that great distance:

"Good-by, Marcelite!"

The tide swept the brig on out of the basin, through the channel around the sand shoals, and thus out into open water.

Then sail was set, the Coast Gypsy crew springing to work with a will.

In good time the brig reached the little bay, near the village of the Coast Gypsies, and Chief Wilder came on board.

A night was spent at anchor in the bay, and, having had a talk with his men who who went with the buccaneer, and asking them bluntly right before him, all he desired to know, he ordered the remainder of the seventy-five on board, and the brig set sail and shaped her course for Boston.

It was in broad daylight when she arrived off the port, but the daring buccaneer chief, disguised thoroughly as a South American skipper, and wearing his right arm in a sling, with splints as though it had been broken, ran right in for an anchorage.

Only half a score men were visible on deck, the remainder being in hiding below, and no one who saw the strange brig come in, dreamed that she held a secret of such importance beneath her decks, and that the bearded skipper was none other than Captain Cutlass, the Cuban Corsair, in disguise.

CHAPTER XXIV.

A STRANGE MANEUVER.

LET US now return to the Fatal Frigate, after her capture of the two French vessels.

That it was a most deadly combat the reader is already aware, and also that the Ill Omen had suffered heavily in men, as well as having been cut up pretty badly by the hot fire of her foes.

The sloop-of-war was so much of a wreck, as far as her masts and rigging were concerned, that she could not be gotten under sail without hours of delay, so that Lionel Lonsdale determined to take her in tow and thus carry her into port.

The Fatal Frigate and the French frigate were both able to maneuver very well, and so they started in, the former with the smaller prize in tow, and the large Frenchman bringing up the rear.

It was now dawn and the vessels could be distinctly seen from the town, and wild were the cheers in honor of the victory.

There were many too who were glad on account of the young commander of the Ill Omen.

He had been treated unfairly, many thought, in having been outlawed for his act in getting a crew and going to sea.

Suspicion alone had condemned him, for at the council held, a few seamen had said that overtures had been made to them to ship on the Ill Omen, and it was told how she was to become a pirate.

Even after the capture of the Spitfire, and

Lionel Lonsdale having sent her in with her chief, as he did, the brand of outlawry was not raised against him, as it should have been.

Many wondered why. Others supposed that it was because he had kept the pirate crew on board, intending really to turn free rover of the seas.

Yet ignorant of the brand of outlawry against him, and only anxious to remain out of port until he could gain some signal victory, which would keep his crew from being taken from him by the admiral, as he expected would be the case if he ran in to an anchorage, the daring young commander had kept away, and his chance for triumph had come sooner than he had expected, when he sighted the two French vessels and captured them.

Upon Point Lookout, the hill where the military and naval officers had gone to see the combat, a great many citizens had also gathered, among them a number of ladies.

Thus had Belle Vernon not been alone, when she drove there with her father.

Admiral Fenton was there also, anxiously watching the combat, and yet the most anxious of all in the party was Frank Fenton.

He watched the battle with fear and trembling. Not that he dreaded the Fatal Frigate would be taken, but, on the contrary, he feared that she would not be.

Those two same vessels had met him in the splendid Saturn, and the equal of the larger French vessel, if not her superior by a few guns and half a hundred men.

But they had driven the Saturn out of the fight very quickly, and no one had condemned, or thought of doing so, the young English captain for not remaining and fighting two such powerful adversaries.

Now here came the Fatal Frigate, a vessel, in the number of guns and men far the inferior of the Saturn, and she had boldly sought the battle.

And more, she had silenced the French sloop-of-war in a most masterly manner, by rare maneuvering, gotten her between her huge consort and herself, while she did so, that she might quickly end the matter with her, and then boldly attacked the large Frigate.

It made Frank Fenton bite his lips with rage, to hear the praise bestowed on every side upon Lionel Lonsdale.

And thus it was he was unpatriotic enough to wish the Fatal Frigate might be captured.

He knew that if taken Lionel Lonsdale would be carried away to a French prison, leaving the field wholly to him, as far as winning the love of Belle Vernon was concerned.

He had offered himself to her, and he had been put off for his answer.

But if Lionel Lonsdale returned a victor, then he feared he knew what his answer would be, for he could not drive the thought from his mind that she loved the young American sailor.

Frank Fenton was aware, too, that should the Ill Omen bring one of the French vessels in as a prize, it would remove from him the brand of outlawry, which had been cruelly put upon him.

But that he could bring both foes in, he had not the remotest idea, though there were several who predicted it, the loudest in these predictions being Major Bert Branscombe.

When therefore the sloop-of-war ceased firing, it was certain to all, that the Ill Omen meant to drive her into port, keeping back, as she followed her, as well as she could, the powerful French frigate.

But words were inadequate to express the amazement of all, when Lionel Lonsdale was seen to steer directly to attack the huge Frenchman.

"He is mad!"

Such was the universal cry.

And Captain Frank Fenton was delighted, for now his rival must fall.

But instead, as the darkness faded before the dawn, the French frigate was seen to strike to the Ill Omen, and loud rung the shouts upon every side.

Still watching, those on Point Lookout beheld the Ill Omen take the sloop-of-war in tow and stand in toward the harbor, the prize-frigate following in their wake, and above each deck floated the king's flag.

They saw a barge put away from the fort and board the Ill Omen.

Then the latter vessel swept around and came to an anchor, signaling the two prizes to do likewise.

Boats passed to and fro from each vessel then, and getting up her anchor the Fatal Frigate stood seaward, leaving the two prizes behind her.

At the same moment a barge from the fort pulled toward the town.

"What did it mean?"

That was the question upon every lip.

But no one could answer.

CHAPTER XXV.

LIONEL LONSDALE'S RESOLVE.

When the three vessels, the victor and the vanquished, headed into port in the early morning, those on their decks saw that the forts were crowded on every rampart with soldiers, send-

ing cheer after cheer toward them in honor of their great triumph.

Upon board the sloop-of-war the crew of Englishmen, with their officers, who had been held as prisoners for weeks, since the vessel had fallen into the hands of the French, had been released from their imprisonment below decks and, over a hundred and fifty strong, they were wild with delight, answering the cheers of the fort's garrison with shout after shout.

Suddenly out from the water-stairs of the fort a barge put forth, and it was headed toward Fatal Frigate.

Lionel Lonsdale had just come on deck from his cabin, where he had been to have a slight wound on the hand dressed, and Lieutenant Harold met him with the remark:

"A superb victory, Captain Lonsdale."

"Yes; but you are wounded, Mr. Harold?"

"Very slightly, sir."

"It is enough to cause you to keep your state-room, sir, and I prefer that you do it; for we are going into port."

The young officer understood the remark, and replied:

"I thank you, Captain Lonsdale, and I will do as you desire."

"It is better, sir, though I hope that the victory we have gained will soon cause a free pardon for all to be issued, while I will see to your especial case myself."

"With your permission, sir, I would rather not yet be known, as, for the reasons I told you, I prefer to wait."

"Very well, Lieutenant Harold; but if you were Cutlass, the Corsair himself, your bravery in the combat we have just fought would gain you a pardon."

"But is that barge not coming on board?"

"Yes, sir, and they are hailing."

"The Ill Omen ahoy!"

The hail came across the water from an officer in the stern of the barge.

"It is Colonel Du Bose," said Lonsdale, and he replied:

"Ahoy the barge!"

"Can I board you, Lonsdale, for I recognize you now?"

"Ay, ay, Colonel Du Bose, come on board."

A moment after the handsome artillery officer grasped the hand of the young captain, while he said:

"The grandest victory I ever saw, and I congratulate you, Lonsdale, especially as those two vessels ran the Saturn, with Captain Frank Fenton, commander, into port several days ago."

"What, did the Saturn meet them?"

"Yes, and was so worsted Fenton put into port, and the Saturn, the Belle of Blue Water and the pirate schooner, Spitfire, were fitted out for the express purpose of going out and attacking the Frenchmen."

"I am sorry to take the glory from Captain Fenton, for I believe you so called him, but he is too late."

"Yes, he was promoted to take the Saturn."

"I expected it."

"But this act will cause the admiral to at once remove the cruel and silly outlawry he put upon you."

"What, sir?"

The eyes of the sailor flashed as he asked the question.

"I forgot, Lonsdale, that you doubtless are ignorant of the fact that a lot of the Town Council met the military and naval leaders some time ago, the admiral presiding, and, on account of your having taken the convicts for a crew, and the swearing of some seamen that you had gone out to turn pirate, the ban of outlawry was put upon your vessel."

Lionel Lonsdale was very white now, but otherwise he showed no emotion.

"And this charge is now against me, Colonel Du Bose?"

"Yes, Lonsdale, I regret to say, for Branscombe, myself and others voted against it, but were over-voted, and you were outlawed."

"Helmsman, let the frigate come round!"

"Forward there!"

"Let fall that anchor!"

"Cast off that tow-line from the sloop."

"Ho! the sloop!"

"Ay, ay, sir!"

"Fetch your craft round as well as you can, and let fall the anchor!"

"Mr. Manly!"

"Ay, ay, sir!"

"Signal the French frigate to come to anchor near the sloop!"

"Ay, ay, sir."

"Now, Mr. Manly, signal the sloop and frigate to lower away two boats and await further orders!"

"Ay, ay, sir."

"Mr. Manly!"

"Sir to you, sir."

"Lower away two boats from the Ill Omen!"

"Ay, sir."

These orders had been given in a rapid, ringing voice, and Colonel Du Bose was evidently surprised at them.

But he was not long left to wonder, for Lionel Lonsdale said:

"Colonel Du Bose, I desire to turn over to you, sir, the French frigate and sloop-of-war,

to hold until taken possession of by Admiral Fenton.

"You are to transfer them to him as prizes of the pirate frigate *Ill Omen*.

"I have lost nearly a hundred men in the combat, killed and wounded, and I shall replace them with seventy-five men from the English crew I rescued.

"I shall keep my prisoners on board with me, as they would doubtless be hanged as pirates, if they were sent ashore.

"Mr. Manly."

"Sir!"

"Signal the sloop to send seventy-five men aboard this frigate at once, and for the English captain to take command of his vessel, and allow my prize crew to come also."

"Yes, sir."

"And have it done at once!"

"Ay, ay, sir."

"Then signal the English captain to send a prize crew from his vessel, of his own released men, on board the French frigate."

"Ay, ay, sir."

"And signal my prize crew on the French frigate to come on board the *Ill Omen* the minute the men from the sloop take charge!"

Robert Manly quickly obeyed the orders given him, while Colonel Du Bose said:

"My dear Lonsdale, but what do you intend to do?"

"I intend to put to sea at once, Colonel Du Bose, with my crew filled up to their proper number by the English prisoners I rescued."

"But if you went up to the town, I am sure the admiral would at once raise the ban upon you."

"Colonel Du Bose, will you please say to Admiral Fenton from me that I have captured a pirate craft and two French vessels, and that if he wishes to see me enter port, he has to withdraw the ban of piracy against me as publicly as it was made, and send an officer to find me and deliver to me word that he has done so."

"If he does not deem it his duty to do that, upon the proof that he still allows me to be branded as an outlaw, I shall know what to do."

"I thank you, Colonel Du Bose, for your very great kindness in telling me what you have, and I surrender my prizes into your keeping."

In vain did Colonel Du Bose urge Lonsdale to come into port, or at least wait there until he could go up to town and see the admiral for him.

The young sailor was obdurate.

"But where will the admiral's messenger find you?"

"It is his duty to find me upon the high seas, where he has placed me under outlawry, and, if he does not remove the ban, and wishes to capture the pirate frigate, let him send Captain Fenton in the *Saturn* to bring me in," and Lonsdale spoke in a way that betokened ill to Frank Fenton should he come.

The transfers of men were now made, to the different vessels, and, bidding Colonel Du Bose good-by, the young sailor ordered the anchor up and sail set, and the beautiful, though unfortunate frigate, headed for the open sea, her crew repairing her shattered hull, torn rigging and shot-ripped sails, as she moved majestically away from the port where the brand of outlawry had been put upon her.

CHAPTER XXVI.

EVE'S WARNING.

FEELING that he had been treated with cruel injustice by Admiral Fenton, Lionel Lonsdale was determined that he would make the old sailor raise the ban upon him as publicly as he had placed against him the charge of being an outlaw.

For this reason he had refused to enter the port, feeling well content that his having captured the pirate schooner *Spitfire*, the French frigate, and released the sloop-of-war which the Frenchmen held as a prize, would be enough in his favor to throw back in the teeth of the old admiral, and his accusers, the charge of his having acted with dishonor.

His having taken the convicts for his crew, and used the pirates from the *Spitfire*, had proven that he knew he could make them the best of sailors.

The frigate had been pretty well scarred up in her fierce fight, though her masts still stood firm.

But there was a topmast shot away, some spars cut in two, rigging severed in many places, sails torn, guns dismounted and the bulwarks badly shattered.

To repair these damages was no easy matter, and as Lionel Lonsdale had determined to enter no port with the brand of outlaw upon him, he decided to sail for a secluded haven where he knew he could refit at will, and in perfect seclusion.

Running in near Portsmouth by night, he sent Robert Manly ashore in a boat, with four men, to purchase there a small sloop and place on board all that was needed to repair the frigate.

Mr. Manly had instructions also to visit Portland, if all that was wanted could not be found in Portsmouth, and then to sail for the rendezvous where he would find the frigate.

Crippled as she was, the *Ill Omen* made slow

headway, and some days passed ere she ran into the secluded haven where her captain piloted her.

It was the very place to fit out a craft, for the very best of spar-timber could be had near, and there was a pine forest within hail, where the wounded could be removed, and recover more rapidly than if housed up below decks.

Men were set to work dressing spars ashore, as soon as the wounded had been carefully removed and placed in tents erected in the woods, and others began the repair of sails, rigging and bulwarks.

Several days after the arrival of the *Ill Omen*, the little vessel purchased by Robert Manly came in, and it had on board of it all that was needed to put the frigate in as good trim as ever she had been.

Seeing that all was going well, and that two weeks would be needed to get all shipshape, for he had no desire to hurry the men, Lionel Lonsdale decided to go to Sealands on a visit.

Leaving Lieutenant Harold, who was rapidly recovering from his wound, in command, Lonsdale took four men with him and set sail in the little sloop for his home.

It was dark when he ran into the little haven and glided alongside of the pier, remarking in his pleasant way to his men:

"Lads, I am at home now, and I'll not forget you."

"We know that, sir, for you're a gentleman, born and bred, and will die the same, sir," replied one of the seamen, who, like all of Lionel Lonsdale's crew, had come to fairly idolize their young commander.

As he sprung ashore a form suddenly confronted him.

"Why, Eve!"

"Yes, brother!"

She sprung into his outstretched arms as she spoke.

"What are you doing down here alone, Eve?" he asked tenderly.

"Oh, I saw the sloop at sunset, and when I beheld her go through the channel between the Twin Brother Islands, I knew that you were on board, as no one else has ever dared to make the attempt."

"So when I saw the sloop coming into the cove, I ran down to meet you."

"And dear mother?"

"Is well, and yet worried."

"Why should she worry, Eve?"

"Well, brother, that strange man has been here."

"Who?"

"Lola's father."

"Ah!"

"Yes, he was here a few days ago."

"Did he tell you what had happened?"

"Yes."

"That Lola was dead?"

"Yes."

"What did he say?"

"He said you had gone to Castle Bleak, and that she had sprung from the cliff and committed suicide."

"True, poor girl."

"He was very stern in manner, yet courtly."

"Why did he come?"

"To see you."

"And you told him I was cruising?"

"Yes; but he said he would find you."

"I will go to see him."

"No, no, Leo, do not, I beg of you."

"Why, child, what ails you?"

"I believe he means you harm."

"Did he say so?"

"No, but his eyes flashed so when he said he would find you."

"He can have nothing against me, Eve."

"Well, brother, his coming has worried mother, for she seems strangely nervous of late."

"Is she not well?"

"Oh, yes, but she will fret about you, and she fears evil will happen to you."

Lionel Lonsdale laughed lightly, but he could not but feel that, wearing as he did then, the brand of an outlaw, that the evil had overtaken him.

He was glad to see that the news had not, by any mischance, reached Sealands, and he hoped to cheer his mother and sister up by telling them of his victory over the Frenchmen.

He found his mother on the piazza to greet him, and every shadow fled from her face as she listened to him tell of his fight with the frigate and the sloop, and the renewed honors she knew would be his.

He told them, too, that his frigate was being refitted, and that he had taken advantage of that circumstance to run up and see them.

A messenger was sent down to the cove to tell the four seamen to come up to the mansion and have their supper, and the meal that they got from the hands of Brady's mother, who was the cook at Sealands, lingered long in their memory.

After a day and night spent at home, Lionel Lonsdale set sail in the sloop to return to his frigate.

But instead of going back the way he came, Eve noticed that he headed up the bay, and she muttered to herself:

"He has gone to Castle Bleak, I know; but I dare not tell mother."

"Oh, why has Lionel gone there, for I am sure that stern-faced man meant harm to him—perhaps to seek revenge upon him for his daughter's death."

"Heaven protect him," and tears dimmed the beautiful eyes of Eve as she watched the rapidly receding vessel.

CHAPTER XXVII.

THE OFFICIAL RETRACTION.

THE strange maneuver of the *Fatal Frigate*, going to sea in her shattered condition, after having given over to Colonel Du Bose the two French vessels, was not understood by the people who witnessed her remarkable move.

Pulling in his barge straight for the town, Colonel Du Bose at once sought the home of Admiral Fenton.

That gentleman had accepted the invitation of Commodore Vernon, to return and breakfast with him, and Major Branscombe and Captain Fenton had also been asked, but the former had been anxious to discover the cause of the *Ill Omen* going to sea, and said he would come at a later hour.

The truth was Belle had urged him to find a solution for the mystery, and he had promised to do so, being as anxious himself to know the cause as was the maiden to have him.

Captain Fenton had also promised to come later, and in fact was in a very unenviable mood.

Seeing that the barge, which he had observed board the *Ill Omen*, was pulling for the water-stairs at the foot of the street leading to the admiral's quarters, Major Branscombe had hastened there, for he had recognized Colonel Du Bose with his glass.

He knew the colonel to be most friendly to Lionel Lonsdale, and the fear came over him that the young captain had been killed and the wild crew had indeed seized the frigate to turn her into a pirate.

As Colonel Du Bose sprung ashore Major Branscombe grasped his hand, for the two were particular friends, though one was of the heavy artillery and the other of the cavalry service.

"My dear Du Bose, what of Lonsdale?"

"He is all right, thank Heaven."

"So say I, thank Heaven!"

"But he has gone to sea."

"Yes."

"Where are you going?"

"To the admiral's; will you come?"

"I will take you to him, for he has gone to Vernon Hall to breakfast, and I promised to go later."

"Is it a secret, or can you tell me what it means?"

"I have not breakfasted, and the thought of getting one of the old commodore's good breakfasts encourages me to get into a good humor."

"Miss Vernon's, colonel, for she is the excellent housekeeper," corrected the major with a smile.

"I accept the amendment, but will we be in time?"

"Oh, yes, for the breakfast hour is eight-thirty the year around."

"It is now three-quarters of an hour before that hour."

"But to Lonsdale."

"Yes; what a magnificent victory!"

"Never saw anything so grand, and he planned so well!"

"He did, as well as we could judge; but he is not wounded?"

"A mere scratch on the hand, which he said was nothing."

"Yet he went to sea?"

"Yes."

"And why?"

"He had not heard of his being outlawed, and said he would not enter port until it was publicly withdrawn."

"He is right; but yet, had he come in, all would have been well."

"I inadvertently referred to it, and I never saw a man get so white."

"He at once issued orders like lightning, and went to sea very quickly, leaving me a message for the admiral, which I shall deliver just as he told me."

The two friends had now reached Vernon Hall, and seeing them approach, Belle met them at the open door.

Her face was pale, and she glanced anxiously at the major, who understood her look, and said:

"The gallant captain is all right, Miss Vernon, but has gone to sea again."

She seemed pleased at this news, as she had feared, in all that mad battle, Lionel Lonsdale had been wounded, perhaps slain.

Leading the visitors into the sitting-room, where the admiral and the commodore were taking a little morning beverage to drive off the effects of the night air, Colonel Du Bose soon told his story.

The admiral heard the words put, that Lionel demanded that he should remove the brand against him, and more, send in search of him to tell him so.

"The fellow is impertinent," said the admiral, hotly.

None of the gentlemen dared reply to this, but Belle Vernon did:

"I think he is but just, Admiral Fenton, for he was branded as a pirate without cause, upon the say-so of several seamen, who may have had some reason for their testimony outside of the truth.

"He gave the lie to the charge of piracy by capturing the worst pirate of these times and sending him to you as a prisoner, along with his vessel and valuable booty.

"And more, he attacked two French vessels, which had driven the Saturn into port, you remember, and he certainly had not as powerful a craft as Captain Fenton commanded.

"He brought you these prizes into port, releasing an English officer and a hundred and fifty men from imprisonment, and, finding that he was outlawed, he has gone to sea, demanding that his actions have spoken louder than the falsehoods of his foes, and it is just that he should be angry."

Belle had not intended to say so much, but she warned with her subject and said just what pleased her father and the two army officers.

The admiral had winced under her words, especially when she spoke of the victory of Lonsdale over the two vessels which had driven his son into port.

He felt in his heart that he had been biased against Lonsdale.

He remembered that he had twice spared his son's life, and more, that he had been outlawed really through the urging of Frank Fenton and the testimony of several seamen that they had been asked to ship on the Ill Omen, which was to be turned into a pirate.

Since she had been at sea the actions of her young commander had refuted these charges, and the admiral felt that his duty was plain.

The "beverage" had warmed his innermost soul, the coming breakfast was anticipated with delight, there were two prizes in the harbor under his command, and so he said, pleasantly:

"My dear young lady, your able argument convinces me that justice should be done.

"I will, this morning, have a special order issued to the effect that Captain Lonsdale was wrongly accused, and is restored to all rights, the ban against his vessel being at once removed."

"And I place the Belle of Blue Water at your service, admiral, to find and deliver to him your official papers to that effect," promptly said the commodore, while Major Branscombe replied:

"As there is no immediate land service for me, and I would like a cruise once more, I volunteer to command the brig, admiral, with your sanction."

Thus it was arranged, and a very pleasant party it was who sat down to breakfast at Vernon Hall, the subject of conversation turning wholly upon the superb victory of the Ill Omen over her powerful adversaries.

CHAPTER XXVIII.

ENVY, HATRED AND MALICE.

ADMIRAL FENTON returned to his quarters immediately after breakfast, and the port captain was there awaiting him.

The sloop-of-war was readily disposed of, for she was returned to her English captain with orders to fit her out with all dispatch.

He was also at the admiral's, and grumbled a little that Captain Lonsdale had taken half of his crew.

"You are fortunate, sir, that you and your men are not now prisoners, and your vessel a prize to the French," said the admiral.

This quieted the English captain, and he departed with the belief that he really was in luck.

The French frigate was a superb vessel, but she had been pretty severely handled by the fire of the Ill Omen, so had to go into the dock for repairs and a complete overhauling, as soon as the other prize, a frigate, had come out.

"I will have a fine navy yet," said the admiral in great glee.

"There is the frigate Le Roi, which will be ready in a couple of weeks; then this last splendid prize, the sloop-of-war, too, which I shall keep on this station, the Saturn, under command of my noble boy, the pirate schooner Spitfire, which will be in fine condition in a few days, and last, and yet by no means least, the Ill Omen, under that splendid fellow, Lonsdale.

"Four frigates, a sloop-of-war and a schooner. "Why, I will defy the Frenchmen on this coast, and if their fleet should appear in sight, I will send my vessels out, under my son, as commodore, to fight them," and the admiral rubbed his hands in great glee, until Major Branscombe quietly remarked:

"Captain Lonsdale, however, admiral, ranks Captain Fenton, so he would have to be the flag officer."

"That's so," was the somewhat gloomy reply of the old sailor.

The repairs on the Saturn were still continued, but not with such such a rush, and the Belle of Blue Water continued her preparations to go to

sea under a gallant merchant captain, to turn privateer.

All were surprised that the privateer brig should be sent to sea with but half a crew, but Commodore Vernon simply said that he knew what he was about, and those who were best acquainted with him thought that he did.

The pirate schooner looked like a new vessel, and being ready the next day, Major Branscombe sailed in her, with a crew taken from the English sloop, to find the Ill Omen and carry to Captain Lonsdale the official papers of the retraction of the charge against him.

The whole trouble in port seemed to be to get men to man the prizes that were to sail under the English flag.

The Saturn had her full crew, but Captain Fenton would not allow any of them to be detached from the frigate, saying that he would go to sea as soon as ready, and needed all of his own men.

It seemed strange to the old admiral that his son had not been near him, and, after the sailing of the Spitfire, and arrangements being made for the two French frigates and sloop-of-war to be put in perfect condition, he sent for the young commander of the Saturn.

He seemed to feel that his son was angry from some cause, and he was not slow in guessing the reason of his anger.

Frank Fenton obeyed his father's summons with an ill-grace.

He found the admiral alone, and the latter greeted him with:

"Well, son, you are quite a stranger, for I have not seen you for three days, though I wished your advice upon some matters."

"You seem to have acted without it, sir," was the sullen reply.

"I have done as I deemed best."

"You have pardoned Lonsdale?"

"No."

"I know that you have."

"I say no."

"Branscombe, an army officer, has sailed in command of the schooner, so anxious were you to send Lonsdale his pardon."

"Major Branscombe was once a naval officer, and, as we have no officers of that service that we could readily spare, I accepted his offer to go and find Lonsdale."

"With his pardon."

"My son, a pardon is given for an offense committed, and Captain Lonsdale had committed no crime, so needed no pardon; but I sent him an official notification that the charges against him had been proven too hastily acted upon, had been disproved by his splendid conduct, and that he was no longer under the ban of outlawry."

"I believe he will yet prove himself an outlaw, or a traitor to the king, which is more."

"Wait until he does; but he had captured the Le Roi, the pirate schooner Spitfire, and last the French frigate and the sloop-of-war, all within several months, and what can you show to equal such a superb record, my son?"

The young captain dropped his head, but said: "No man blamed me for retreating before a vessel fully my equal, and another of half her strength."

"True, but Lonsdale, with a craft little stronger than the weaker one, whipped both."

"I did not come here to be abused, father."

"Your abuse is imaginary, my son, for I have done more for you than for any other being."

"I placed you, over the head of Lonsdale, in command of the finest frigate on the American waters, be they French, Spanish or English, and this man whom you hate so, who saved your life twice in your double duel with him, has taken a craft that all feared, that no one would command, and with the old haunted hulk he has performed prodigies of valor."

"Now, Frank, what your chances are with Miss Vernon, you know best, but I believe she thinks more of Lonsdale than she does of you, and you had better be a man and quit this spiteful, envious fight you are making against him."

"He shall not have her," was the savage response.

"I only hope that you will win, but I fear that you will not."

"He shall not, mark my words, Admiral Fenton," was the hot reply of the young captain, as he arose to depart.

"Be careful, my son, or you may go too far, and though we rule these American people, they are not to be trifled with."

"That is it, and you expect Lonsdale, an American, to be true to the king, when the war breaks out, for it is coming, and quickly, too, between the Colonies and Great Britain?"

"What do you think he will do?"

"Turn his vessel into an American pirate, and begin to prey upon English commerce."

"He may, but I do not believe it of him while he holds a king's commission," was the response of the old admiral.

CHAPTER XXIX.

THE ILL OMEN'S LUCK.

TRUE to his determination Lionel Lonsdale had gone to Castle Bleak, sailing there in the little sloop, as Eve had feared that he would.

But Mr. Leslie was again away from home, and leaving word with Enos, that he had been to see him, Lionel Lonsdale returned to where his frigate lay hidden in the little bay.

As he ran for the anchorage, he saw a large brig in the offing, standing slowly along, for the wind was light, and upon reaching the frigate Lieutenant Harold told him that the brig had been standing off and on for half the day.

"It has a signal set, sir, for I went to the rocks above, and I would not be at all surprised if she is a French smuggler and is waiting for some craft on the coast to meet her and take her cargo," said the young lieutenant.

Going up to the rocky lookout Lonsdale took a long look at the strange vessel, and what he saw convinced him that Harold was right.

"Get six boats ready, with muffled oars for to-night, and a hundred men, Mr. Harold."

"Put a boat howitzer in two of them, and I think, as the night will be dark, and the wind light, we can capture the brig, and the vessel that comes out to meet her."

The preparations were at once made, and, shortly after dark, as Lionel Lonsdale suspected would be the case, a small schooner was seen standing out from the coast and heading toward the brig, which was a league away.

"She has been hiding inshore until night," said Captain Lonsdale, and he ordered his men into the boats.

Two boats were to make a wide *detour*, approaching the brig from seaward, one was to come up on either side, and the remaining two were to approach from the land.

The first two boats started on their way, then the next two, and last those to attack from the shore.

The schooner meanwhile had signaled the brig with colored lights, and the signals had been promptly answered.

Then came the plunge as the brig's anchor was let fall, and the schooner glided slowly out to her and ran alongside.

The skies were obscured with clouds, so that the night was very dark, while the breeze was hardly blowing three knots.

An hour passed, and then Lionel Lonsdale, who was in one of the boats to pull directly out from the shore, gave the order:

"Give way, lads!"

Not a ripple came from the muffled oars as the boats moved on, and at a short distance off they were not visible in the darkness.

Busy with the work in hand, which was the transferring of fine laces, silks, velvets, wines and other dutiable goods from the brig's hold to the deck of the English coasting-schooner, no one sighted the approaching boats, until suddenly a cry of alarm arose as they were almost upon them.

Loud orders rung out, and shots were fired.

But Lionel Lonsdale and his boat's crew were soon upon the schooner, and then began a hand-to-hand fight.

The smugglers were numerous, and both the schooner's crew and the brig's fought desperately; but one after another the Ill Omen's boats came up, and the battle was soon over.

"A valuable prize this, Harold, for the brig is French and richly laden, and the schooner has a score of the coast smugglers known as the Casco Corsairs on board."

"Yes, Captain Lonsdale, it is a rich capture, and especially to me, for there is a prisoner among the Casco Corsairs, as you call them, that I wish to keep as my especial prize," returned Lieutenant Harold.

"Ha! one of those whom you have recognized?"

"Yes, sir."

"Has he seen you?"

"No, sir."

"Very well, send him below and give him a place to himself."

"I thank you, sir."

"And do not let him see you, for I have a plan to suggest to you."

"Yes, sir," and the face of the lieutenant wore a happy look while he muttered:

"Yes, he is my special prize, and I ask no more—yes, now for the others."

CHAPTER XXX.

FOUND IN THE FOG.

WISHING to keep his prizes with him, Captain Lonsdale carried them into the little bay, where the Ill Omen was undergoing repairs, and there kept them until the frigate was ready for sea once more.

Then he set sail, determined to send the brig, the schooner, and the little sloop he had purchased into the harbor by night and give them into the keeping of Colonel Du Bose.

What would be done by the admiral regarding his being outlawed he did not know, but he meant to faithfully do his service for the king as long as he was in command of the vessel bearing the British ensign above her decks.

As he sailed down the coast one night, in close company with the other three vessels, a fog came over the sea and shut all out of view.

The other vessels were hailed, and, as the wind was blowing light, told to go under very little sail and to keep the frigate constantly in sight.

Thus they went along in column, the Ill Omen

leading, the brig following, next the schooner, and the little sloop bringing up the rear.

Suddenly ahead of the frigate was heard a loud hail, then stern orders in French, and next a heavy gun.

A crash followed and cries, oaths, pistol-shots and the clash of steel.

It was very evident that two vessels of hostile flags had come together in the fog and were fighting for the mastery.

The orders in French, and some sound English oaths from the other side, told Lionel Lonsdale that the vessels were French and English.

So his duty was plain.

The frigate had not been seen by either of the other vessels, and glided, under sail that had been shortened and barely gave her headway, directly alongside of a large vessel.

"Boarders, follow me!"

This stern command, and the throwing of the grapnels from the frigate were the first indication that the Frenchmen had of an enemy on that side of them.

Upon the other side of the French vessel, which was a large barque, armed with a light battery, lay a small schooner.

Upon the deck of the latter a fierce hand-to-hand fight was raging, the Frenchmen having boarded the little vessel, as they ran upon it in the fog.

"This is easy work, for she is but a store-ship, well armed," cried Lionel Lonsdale, as he reached the deck of the Frenchman, followed by his crew.

A cry of alarm now arose from those on the barque, which told their comrades fighting on the schooner, that they had another enemy to face.

But even in the night and fog they saw that they had a large frigate lying alongside, and with but a hundred men they quickly cried for quarter.

Springing to the side of the barque Lonsdale glanced down upon the schooner, and he beheld there none other than Major Bert Branscombe, with a gallant crew at his back, holding his vessel against the onslaught of twice as many Frenchmen.

"Ho, Branscombe, I greet you!"

"But the fight is over, so let those gentlemen surrender to you."

"Lonsdale, as I live!" cried the major.

"Ay, ay, sir, the Fatal Frigate lies on the other side of this barque, whose captain has surrendered to me," and calling out to the French lieutenant and his men on the schooner, addressing them in French, Lonsdale continued, "Monsieur, your barque is my prize."

"Pray surrender your arms, and those of your men, to that gentleman."

The Frenchmen were amazed, but a word from their captain quickly let them know that they were prisoners, and Major Branscombe boarded the barque and joined Lonsdale.

"You saved me, Lonsdale, for they were two to one, and had boarded me, as you saw."

"We ran together in the fog."

"It was a lucky meeting with you, major; but come, let us hear what this French captain has to say," and they walked aft to where the French commander stood, looking very gloomy.

About him were a number of officers, some of high rank, wearing both the naval and military uniforms of France.

"Monsieur, I sympathize with you that the fortunes of war are against you."

"Pray what is your vessel, where bound and who have you with you?" and Lonsdale spoke with marked courtesy.

"This is a store-ship, monsieur, the French armed barque Typhoon, and we were *en route* to join the fleets of our nation on the American coast, with supplies, and a few officers of the army and navy."

"You have made a valuable capture, monsieur, but if not for the fog no vessel could catch the Typhoon."

"I thank you, monsieur, and permit me to say that while under my charge, you and your brother officers shall have the freedom of your vessel, though under your *parole d'honneur* not to attempt to seize the ship, or escape."

"Your crew I will transfer to my frigate, and place an officer and men on board to man your craft," and giving the necessary orders, Lonsdale then turned to Major Branscombe and invited him to his cabin, while Lieutenant Harold soon brought order out of chaos, and the fleet of, now six vessels, held on their way once more.

CHAPTER XXXI.

STILL AT SEA.

A STYLISH carriage, with coachman and footman in livery, was driving along a road in the outskirts of Boston.

In it were two persons, Commodore Vernon and his beautiful daughter.

They had been out to Valley Vernon, the fine farm of the old commodore, situated a few miles from the city, and where the father and daughter were wont to drive once a week.

As the highway wound over an eminence, from which a view of the harbor and sea could be seen Belle cried out excitedly:

"Father, see there!"

"Well, my child?" and the commodore adjusted his spectacles.

"Is it not the schooner, sir?"

"What schooner?"

"The Spitfire!"

"Oh yes!"

"Well, it is the schooner," added the commodore, as his eyes now fell upon the vessel in question.

"And those vessels in her wake, father?"

"Bless my soul, there are one, two, three, four following the schooner!"

"Yes, sir, a large armed barque, a brig, a small schooner and a sloop."

"What does it mean, father?"

"I am at a loss to know."

"The Spitfire went out to find the Ill Omen?"

"Yes."

"And comes back with four vessels in her wake."

"She has captured them."

"No, father, the Spitfire could never capture that large armed barque, which must carry a crew of over a hundred men, for she is pierced for a broadside of twelve guns."

"That is so, and the schooner has but nine."

"But we will soon know."

"Drive on rapidly, Dobbins."

The coachman touched up his horses, and the carriage rolled rapidly on into town.

Arriving there they found a great deal of excitement, and all that could be learned as to the cause was what a boat's crew, which had brought Major Branscombe ashore, reported, that the vessels were the prizes of the *Fatal Frigate*!

"Go home, Dobbins!"

"We will soon know all, as Branscombe will call," and the latter was said to his daughter.

The commodore was right, for Major Branscombe did soon call, arriving at Vernon Hall just as the lamps were being lighted.

Belle was seated at the window awaiting him, for she felt sure that he would come to see her, as soon as he had made his report to the admiral.

"I welcome you back, Major Branscombe," she said in her sweet way, as she offered her hand.

The commodore also greeted the young officer warmly, for the major was a great favorite of his.

"And I bring news that will please you," said the officer.

"You brought prizes enough."

"Not mine, commodore."

"Whose then?"

"The Fatal Frigate's."

"Umph! that craft is a fatal one to Frenchmen."

"Yes, commodore, she deserves her name in one sense, and should be named the Fortunate Frigate in another."

"But I suppose you would like to know what I have to tell?"

There was no need of an answer to this question, for both the commodore and Belle showed by their looks that they were dying of curiosity. So the major said:

"I deemed the best place to find Lonsdale was in the vicinity of his home."

"No doubt," slyly said the maiden, and the major flushed at the insinuation.

"So I went there, he having told me where he lived."

"I secured a fisherman on the coast who knew how to run into the harbor of Sealands, for that is the name of his plantation, and I arrived there at sunset."

"As I was in my attire as a king's dragoon, Miss Lonsdale recognized me even before I landed."

"Was that the only reason, major?" again asked Belle, with a look of mischief.

"I hope it was not the uniform alone, Miss Belle."

"But I told her mother and herself of my mission, and I learned that Captain Lonsdale had been there several days before, in a small sloop, leaving his frigate at a secluded part of the coast, where it was undergoing repairs."

"Miss Lonsdale could not tell me just where, so I had to go on a search for the Ill Omen."

"I suppose you started at once?"

"No, Miss Belle, I remained at Sealands until the next day, and perhaps you would like to know something about the captain's mother and her home?"

It was Belle's turn to blush now, and she said, quickly:

"I suppose it is a pleasant place?"

"It is a charming spot, overlooking Casco Bay and the sea, and is certainly a grand old home. The house being of stone, with ornamental grounds and all about it to make it comfortable."

"The fisherman who acted as my pilot surprised me by the information that the Lonsdales were enormously rich, whereas I supposed the captain had only his prize-money and his pay."

"Yes, so I thought," put in the commodore.

"Well, I looked along the coast for the Ill Omen without success, and was about to return to Sealands to discover if aught more had been heard of the captain, when, that night in a dense fog, I ran plump upon a large French

store-ship, and though I fought back my foes, I would have had to surrender, had not the Ill Omen come up unseen in the mist, bearded the barque from the other side, and saved me."

"Bravo!" cried the commodore.

"The barque was a most valuable craft, with French army and navy officers on board, coming to their commands here in America, and in the fleets, and she is filled with most valuable stores."

"But Lonsdale had with him a French brig which he had captured smuggling a cargo of laces, silks, and other things on board a schooner which belonged to the Casco Corsairs, as they are called."

"He captured both the brig and schooner, and, with his little sloop, was heading for this port, to send them in as prizes, when he ran upon the barque and Spitfire."

"How fortunate; but you gave him the paper you bore?"

"And he was pleased, I know," said the commodore.

"Without doubt, sir; but he simply thanked me for my looking him up, said it was very noble in Miss Vernon to say what she had to the admiral, and which I told him made the papers forthcoming, and took the document as his right."

"As it is; but you were kind to speak so of me, major," said Belle.

"You deserved all that I said, Miss Belle."

"But why did Lonsdale not come into port with you, as he has the admiral's withdrawal of the charge?" asked the commodore.

"I hope he considers it sufficient, for I fear the old admiral will do no more," Belle remarked.

"There is a power behind the throne," with the admiral, Miss Vernon, that is working against Lonsdale."

"I understand you—it is Captain Fenton, the admiral's son."

"Yes."

"But why did not Lonsdale come in, for that paper was a complete vindication," urged the commodore.

"He discovered from the French officers, I believe, just where the French fleet could be found, and so he has gone there, hoping to cut out one of their vessels, after which he will come here," and the words of the major caused Belle Vernon to turn pale with dread.

CHAPTER XXXII.

A PIRATE IN PORT.

THE brig which had sailed from the island retreat of the Cuban Corsair, dropped anchor in a part of the harbor that commanded a good view of the different vessels at anchor there.

The Spitfire had just run into the harbor, followed by the prizes sent in by Lionel Lonsdale, and the disguised pirate was delighted to see the fleet little craft in such splendid trim.

He also discovered that, having accomplished her work, her crew were taken off and returned to the sloop-of-war, leaving but a couple of seamen on board as a guard.

This pleased the buccaneer greatly, and every thing seemed to work to suit him, for into port sailed the Pretty Ellen, the fleet, new coasting packet, on which Eve Lonsdale had taken passage for home, and been captured by the Spitfire.

The buccaneer remembered that the packet schooner had outsailed the fleet little Spitfire then, and, but for his long-range pivot gun he would never have captured her.

Rigged as a coaster she would bear a great deal more sail, with a battery on board, and then would be far faster than the Spitfire.

So he reasoned, and so he wanted the packet schooner.

The Spitfire was, however, armed, and he knew not how to get guns for the packet schooner.

In this trouble Leon, the Coast Gypsy, whom he had made his first officer, suggested that he cut out both vessels, and, after a trial of speed at sea, take the faster one for his purpose, and send the other to his retreat, to remain there as a reserve in case he should need another vessel.

This seemed to please the One-Armed Buccaneer, and he decided to follow the advice of his Gypsy lieutenant.

As he could not keep three-score men below decks all the time, he had allowed some to go ashore each night and find quarters, so that after being a few days in port he had only what appeared to be a working crew on the brig.

He had received good offers for the cargo of wood he carried, but he knew that such woods were scarce, and held on for a big sum, which he had at last gotten.

While in his disguise the One-Armed Pirate had also made himself acquainted with Vernon Hall and its surroundings, for he was determined, when he carried out the schooner, he would have Belle Vernon a captive on board.

He also sent two of his men by stage to Portland, to there find out all they could of how to reach the home of Lionel Lonsdale, making an arrangement to meet them at a certain tavern in the town, of which he had heard.

Thus matters seemed to go well for the corsair, and he was anxious to strike while the iron was hot, and before Lionel Lonsdale returned to port, for somehow he had a great dread of that young sailor.

"We must delay no longer, Leon," he said one afternoon, as the two sat in the cabin of the brig.

"You know your own affairs best, captain, and I am ready whenever you say the word," answered the young sailor.

"It would be too dangerous to attempt to run off with the packet schooner the night we cut the Spitfire out, so I have a new plan."

"Yes, sir."

"It is to let the packet sail, which she intends to do to-morrow night, and then we will board the Spitfire and carry her out."

"Well, captain?"

"The packet will put into Portsmouth for a day, and we can lay in hiding along the coast and catch her as she comes out."

"Yes, sir, that would be better; but why would it not be better to take her as soon as she leaves port?"

"We will not go out until after she does."

"True, captain, but I can go on board with half a dozen men in disguise, some of them in female attire, as passengers, and we can seize her after she leaves port, and join you when you come out in the schooner."

"You have hit it, Leon, and it is a splendid plan."

"Go ashore to-night, select the men you wish, and engage passage on the packet."

"To-morrow I will sell the cargo to the merchant that made me the best offer, and the brig shall go to another, so I will have my men ready to board the schooner after the packet sails and run out with her."

"There will be no trouble about passing the forts?"

"No, I think not, for I shall say I am going in search of the Ill Omen, and if there is trouble, then I must run the gantlet of their fire."

"And the lady, sir?"

"I shall manage to get her into my possession soon after dark, and I think I can arrange it without trouble."

"Now go ashore and select the men you need, and I'll get rid of the cargo and brig early in the morning."

Thus the two parted, and the One-Armed Buccaneer retired to rest that night fully convinced that the consummation of his plot for revenge against Lionel Lonsdale, and to bleed Commodore Vernon of his gold, not to speak of his being once more afloat on an armed vessel, was on the highway to perfect success.

CHAPTER XXXIII.

LEON'S GAME.

CAPTAIN AMOS CALDWELL, of the pretty packet-schooner, was a regular "Down-East" skipper, just such as are still found along the Maine and Massachusetts coasts to-day.

Boy and man he had been a coaster for thirty years, and at last had married a pretty Yankee girl with a snug home in a Kennebec village, while he had saved money enough to have built for him a trim and fleet sailing-boat, which, after his wife, he had named the Pretty Ellen.

It was this vessel, upon her first run out, that Eve Lonsdale had been a passenger on, and been captured by the pirate schooner Spitfire, simply through an unlucky shot as the craft was getting out of range.

His vessel was released by Captain Lonsdale, who thereby gained a lasting friend in the Yankee skipper.

Captain Caldwell had made his voyage up to the Kennebec, stopping at Portsmouth and Portland on the way, and had returned with the passenger list full and a good cargo.

He had set his day for sailing, and meant to run out at sunset, but was disappointed in getting passengers back, as he had expected.

Still he had a paying freight and did not care much, and so had just expressed himself to his crew, when a man approached and asked:

"Is this Captain Amos Caldwell?"

"It are. I declar' to gracious, I be."

"Of the Kennebec packet, Pretty Ellen?"

"It be my vessel's name, stranger."

"Can you carry passengers this run?"

"That's what ther craft are fer, I declar' to gracious, it is."

"Well, I wish to go, and there is quite a party with me—all going to see our folks in Portland."

"I want to know!"

"Yes, there be my father and mother—pretty old people now—my father's brother and his two boys, and myself."

"I see."

"Six of us."

"I has the room for you, stranger, and glad to git yer, I declar' to gracious, I is."

"When do you sail?"

"To-night at sunset."

"We'll be here by dark anyhow, if you won't mind waiting a little while."

"No, I likes to be accommodatin', and if I git away by an hour arter sunset I'm content."

"We will be here, cap'n, so have our berths all ready for us, as we has the gold to pay for what we gets."

"Keep this as a token I mean business," and the stranger thrust several guineas into the hand of Captain Caldwell.

About an hour after sunset there came down

to the wharf a party of seven persons, the stranger who had arranged for the passage saying to Captain Caldwell:

"I've got another passenger for you, cap'n."

"The more the better, stranger, and thank ye."

First there were assisted on board an aged couple who seemed to walk with difficulty.

Then an old man and two young men, whom the stranger said was:

"My uncle and his boys."

The "other passenger" was a hardy-looking young man, and, with the stranger, made up seven passengers.

All went below except the stranger and his friend, and the Pretty Ellen at once got under way.

As she passed the captured pirate schooner, Spitfire, she was seen to be getting up her anchor, and a boat's crew of seamen were going on board.

"That's a war craft, hain't it, cap'n?" asked the stranger, who had given his name as Dusenberry.

"Yas, she has seen a heap o' war. I declar' to gracious she has, for she war a pirit once, and captured my own Pretty Ellen, here on her first voyage."

"But she's a king's schooner now, having been taken by the grandest man as wears British uniform; I declare to gracious he is."

"Who is that?"

"Cap'n Lionel Lonsdale, who commands the Fatal Frigate."

"What, the Haunted Ship?"

"Thet same."

"They tried to say he was a pirate."

"They lied, and them has eat the lie that told it, for he's a true one, if any man are, though he be an American in the king's uniform."

"But I wonder what the schooner are gittin' ready fer sea fer?"

"Maybe for a short cruise."

"Maybe so, stranger, though she has just returned from a cruise, and a good one, they tells me."

And so the Pretty Ellen sped on her way, went by the forts out to sea, and gaining good sea room, laid her course for Portsmouth.

Hardly had she done so, when Mr. Dusenberry asked the captain if two of his men could go below and help move a heavy chest which had been carried aboard as part of the passengers' baggage.

The men were at once sent to the cabin, though the skipper thought that the two stout young men, nephews of the old couple, might have done the moving.

Captain Caldwell had a crew of four men, a negro cook and a cabin boy, and the moment after the two seamen had gone into the cabin, Mr. Dusenberry was joined on deck by his two "cousins" and his friend, and the former said in a quiet way, as he presented a pistol in the face of the amazed skipper:

"Captain, you are my prisoner, sir, for your two men are in irons below, and your crew on deck we can readily master."

"Resist, and I will kill you!"

Amos Caldwell was never more taken aback in his life; but it is possible, even against the odds, he would have resisted had not he suddenly seen the old "couple" and the aged "brother" spring on deck, a cutlass in one hand, a pistol in the other.

"Well, lieutenant, shall we toss 'em into the sea?" asked the one whom the skipper had considered an old, infirm woman.

"No; we will simply put them in irons and await the coming of the schooner," was the reply of Leon the Coast Gypsy, for he it was who had so cleverly planned the capture of the Pretty Ellen.

"Waal, strangers, I is dead beat, and no mistake!"

"I declar' to gracious I is," said the skipper, dolefully, as he saw that resistance would be madness, and accordingly surrendered, while he asked:

"But who be ye?"

"A part of the crew of the Cuban Corsair, now known as the One-Armed Buccaneer," was the calm reply of Leon the Coast Gypsy.

CHAPTER XXXIV.

CLEVERLY EXECUTED.

BUT what of the plot of the One-Armed Buccaneer, to get possession of his old vessel?

He had, as he said he would, early disposed of his cargo, for a large cash sum, and afterward sold his brig for a fair price.

Having acquainted himself with the town, he had found a Jew clothier where he could purchase a complete outfit for his crew of second-hand uniforms for marines and seamen, and these had been sent to the different quarters of his men.

A very shrewd man, Captain Cutlass had discovered the fact that the officers and crew of the Saturn, knew little, if anything, of those on board the sloop-of-war, which had lately been recaptured by the Fatal Frigate.

Spending his money freely he had gained all the information he needed, and was well assured that a party of seamen, or pretended marines, could, after nightfall, make their way to some

secluded wharf and there take to a boat awaiting them.

Once upon the water there was no danger of their being noticed, for the guard-boats did not begin duty in the harbor until eight o'clock.

If challenged, they could answer that they were from the sloop-of-war, or Saturn, as circumstances dictated.

If seen going on board the schooner Spitfire, and demanded the reason, the pirate meant to reply that he was obeying orders from the admiral.

Once he got anchor up, and sail set unchallenged, he did not doubt but that he could slip by the Saturn, for if hailed he would find some good excuse for a reply, and from there must take his chances, which, as a man of indomitable pluck he was willing to do.

The One-Armed Buccaneer had most skillfully laid his plans, sending on board the Pretty Ellen, as "baggage of the passengers," all he needed on the Spitfire.

As soon as it was dark the Coast Gypsy crew began to leave their respective quarters in the town, and make their way to the different wharves selected for them to embark from.

The pirate captain had driven down to the wharf in a carriage with four men, one of whom bore what appeared to be a muffled human form and had gone off in a small boat to the schooner. The men in charge had promptly hailed:

"Boat ahoy!"

"Ay, ay, the Spitfire!" answered Captain Cutlass.

"What boat is that?"

"An officer from Admiral Fenton with orders."

"Ay, ay, sir, come alongside?"

The pirate captain did so promptly, stepped on deck and said politely to the man, who saluted, seeing him in uniform:

"I wish to see you and your comrade in the cabin, for I have secret orders for you, as there is to be an attempt made to seize this schooner to-night."

The other watchman just then came forward, the cabin companionway was unlocked, and the three entered.

As they did so three of the crew of the boat crowded in after them, and, expecting no harm they were felled to the floor by heavy blows and in an instant had been gagged and ironed.

"So far, good!"

So muttered the pirate, and ordering the two prisoners to be sent forward, and the man who bore the burden in his arms to enter the cabin, he went on deck to see his men come on board.

Soon a boat was seen approaching, and as it drew near he hailed:

"Spitfire!"

The answer came in a low tone:

"Ay ay, come alongside!"

Five minutes after the men from this boat had boarded, another appeared in the darkness.

"Boat ahoy!" sung out the pirate leader.

"Coast Gypsy!"

"Ay, ay, all right!"

A third boat soon after came in view, coming down the harbor, and once more was heard from the schooner:

"Boat ahoy!"

"Pretty Ellen!"

"Come aboard!"

"One more and we will have all," muttered the chief.

It was then that the packet schooner was seen approaching, and soon after passed on her way to sea.

Almost in her wake came a fourth boat, and the hail brought the response:

"Fatal Frigate!"

It seemed to suit the buccaneer, for he ordered the boat aboard.

Then the anchor was hauled out of the mud, the sails were set, and the four boats cast adrift, that had brought off the men, the small one in which the One-Armed leader and his four men had come, being towed astern, for use if necessary.

Down the harbor glided the schooner, and as she passed near the Saturn stern came the hail:

"Ho, the Spitfire!"

"Ay, ay, sir."

"Where bound?"

"The packet schooner Pretty Ellen has an escaped prisoner on board, and I am ordered to overhaul her and bring him back."

"Ay ay; but where did you get your crew?"

"From the sloop-of-war."

Then the schooner passed on, and the next hail came from the fort.

The same story was coolly told again, and the Spitfire stood out to sea, free as a bird.

"We have made it."

"Now, about the packet schooner?" said the One-Armed Buccaneer in an exultant tone.

"Lieutenant Leon has made no mistake, sir," replied the Coast Gypsy, who was acting as second officer.

"I hope not."

As though to give proof of the Coast Gypsy's words, there came from the lookout aloft, as the schooner sped out into the open ocean:

"Sail, ho!"

"Whereaway!"

"Off our port quarter, sir."

"Ay, ay; helmsman, head for yonder craft, for it is the Pretty Ellen, and she is waiting for us."

"Now I am myself once more," and a wicked glare was reflected from the eyes of the pirate chief, as he stood in the light of the cabin companionway.

CHAPTER XXXV.

KIDNAPPED.

A SLENDER form came out of the front door of Vernon Hall and paced up and down the broad piazza.

The sun was setting in a rich mass of piled-up clouds, and the scene was one of great beauty, causing the maiden to stand and gaze in admiration upon the glorious dying of the day.

As the twilight deepened, she left the piazza and walked along the gravel drive leading to the massive front gateway.

Suddenly she stopped, for the sound of wheels fell upon her ear.

"He is coming, for the carriage turns in the gateway; but I expected he would be on horseback," said the maiden.

The carriage was passing her when she hailed the driver.

Quickly he drew rein, and a form at once sprung out.

Quickly, ere a word was said, a heavy cloak was thrown over the head of the maiden, and she was taken up bodily and thrust into the carriage.

The door closed with a bang, as the order came:

"Drive on, and use the whip!"

At the gateway the vehicle paused an instant while two men sprung inside, and then it rolled on at the same rapid pace.

Night had settled down now, but an officer in brilliant uniform, mounted on a spirited charger, and with spurs and trappings jingling, dashed by, going in the direction that the carriage had come.

"That is Major Bert Branscombe, for I remember him well," said one of the men who had entered the carriage at the gate.

At his words a cry broke from the lips of the maiden, but it was quickly checked by a rude hand being thrust over her mouth.

"You must not do that, Miss Vernon, for you force me to be rude."

"I am sorry, but I must put this bandage over your mouth to prevent your outcries, and also bind you."

"I will be still," came in a faint voice.

"No, I cannot trust you, and we have too much at stake to take any chances."

As the man spoke, he placed a handkerchief over the mouth of his captive and bound her hands securely.

It was dark when the carriage drew up at a wharf, and dismounting first, the leader of the party said:

"Driver, here is your pay, and I've been liberal."

"Now, Miss Vernon, you must allow yourself to be wrapped in my cloak and borne aboard my schooner."

"Ca-par, you carry the lady, and keep her in charge until I have secured the two guards on yonder schooner."

"Ay, ay, sir!"

Ten minutes after the captive found herself alone in the Spitfire's cabin, her hands bound behind her and the bandage yet over her mouth, for Captain Cutlass was not a man to take chances of a woman's scream from on board the escaping schooner.

After passing the forts Captain Cutlass entered the cabin and hastily removed the bandage and bonds, and he said politely as he was doing so:

"I am sorry to have been obliged to be a trifle rude, Miss Vernon, but I have kidnapped you to hold until your father pays me a princess's ransom for your return."

"You will not be harmed, but, on the contrary treated with marked courtesy, while, in a few days, you will have the company of Miss Eve Lonsdale, for I am now going to her home to make her my captive also, though no ransom will ever buy her from me."

"Miss Eve Lonsdale?"

"Yes, the lovely sister of the man I believe you are to marry, as report has it—Captain Lionel Lonsdale."

"But I must go on deck, now, as I have another prize near at hand."

So saying the One-Armed Pirate left the cabin, and his captive sunk upon a chair with a low moan of sorrow.

The Spitfire soon came near the Pretty Ellen, which was lying to, awaiting her, and Captain Cutlass hailed:

"Ho, Leon!"

"Av, ay, captain!"

"All right?"

"Yes, sir."

"Any passengers?"

"None except ourselves, sir."

"Any one killed?"

"No, sir."

"Then bundle the skipper and his men into

the boat I send aboard of you and let them go ashore."

"Ay, ay, sir!"

"I have Miss Vernon on board, and I shall head for my other fair captive now; but I will send half a dozen men in the boat as help for you to man the schooner, and then follow me."

"Ay, ay, captain!"

"And see what the Pretty Ellen can do as to speed with the Spitfire."

"She is a good sailer, sir, as I have already seen," was the answer of the lieutenant.

The boat towing astern was then hauled alongside, half a dozen of the crew were ordered into it and it pulled for the packet.

The Spitfire then continued on her course, while the unhappy captain and his men were put into the boat and started for Salem, the nearest port.

Having got rid of them Lieutenant Leon at once crowded on sail in chase of the Spitfire, which was now a mile ahead.

Having satisfied himself that his bold plot had been successful without a break, Captain Cutlass gave orders to head for the vicinity of Portland, and then went into his cabin.

His captive sat at the table, pale and anxious. She had heard all that had passed between the pirate chief and his lieutenant, and was made aware that the Pretty Ellen had also been captured.

"Miss Vernon, I came to say that this cabin is wholly at your service, so you need fear no intrusion, and as you know your father will quickly pay the large ransom I shall demand, you need give yourself but slight uneasiness as to your captivity."

"Good-night, madam."

Leaving the cabin the chief mused:

"A pretty girl, but not as beautiful as I expected to find her."

"But then, her vast wealth makes her the grand lady I have heard her called."

"Now, Miss Lonsdale is more to my liking by far, and for her I would give up piracy."

"I must win her heart and then get rid of that jealous little wife of mine."

"But how can I do it is the question."

"Well, now to kidnap the fair Eve."

"I must think up the best way to get her into my power without alarming her."

"Ah! as I live, that packet schooner is creeping up, and I must make the Spitfire do her best," and the pirate gave orders to set all sail.

A seven-knot breeze was blowing, and the sea was comparatively smooth; but for all that the Pretty Ellen begun to overhaul the Spitfire at a lively pace, and the fact caused Captain Cutlass to say:

"I shall run into some safe haven and transfer the Spitfire's guns to her decks, for she is the fastest craft by far."

CHAPTER XXXVI.

INSNARED.

SEATED upon the veranda at Sealands, some days after the sailing of the Spitfire and Pretty Ellen from the harbor of Boston, Eve Lonsdale sighted a sail coming across the bay, as though to run into the little harbor of the plantation.

She got her glass and turned it upon the vessel, and said aloud:

"Why, it is the Pretty Ellen!"

"Evidently she is bringing some passenger here to Sealands."

Her mother had driven over to the village, some miles distant, so that she was alone.

Watching the schooner approach, and wondering what had caused her to come to Sealands, she saw that she did not run into the cove, but luffed and dropped anchor outside.

Then a boat was lowered and put off from the side.

It contained two oarsmen and a man in the stern.

Eve had thought of the vessels coming in connection with her brother, in some way, and the dread had come upon her that he was wounded.

She therefore eagerly awaited the arrival of the boat, and saw the man who had been in the stern coming toward the house.

As the stranger drew near the piazza she arose to meet him, and saluting her with marked respect, he said:

"I wish to see Miss Lonsdale."

"I am she."

"I have a letter here, lady, from my captain for you," and the man handed a sealed letter to her.

"From my brother, you mean, sir?"

"Yes, lady, for I am a seaman on Captain Lonsdale's vessel."

"Indeed! be seated please, while I read the letter."

Breaking the seal she read:

"On Board H. M. Frigate Ill Omen,
Off the Kennebec,
Thursday."

"MY DEAR SISTER:—

"I had anticipated coming by home to see you upon an important matter, but sighting the Pretty Ellen coming out of the Kennebec, begged her captain to bear this letter to you, and bring you to me off Portsmouth, where I am now going."

"I have a matter of importance to see you about, and of which I dare not write, but it is something

that you can greatly aid me in, and I shall have to ask you to go on to Boston with me."

"As you may be detained there, you had best bring a chest with you of clothing, and, if it is necessary for to stay any great length of time, I will have Skipper Caldwell go by Sealands and bring our good mother down to Boston, for the change would do her a world of good."

"Do not delay, as it is necessary that I see you soon."

"My devoted love to mother, who I know will pardon my taking you from her at this time, when she knows it is imperative, though do not let this fact alarm her."

"Your ever loving brother."

"LEO."

Eve read this letter through with surprise, for what could it be that her brother wanted her for, she wondered.

Still she did not doubt its being genuine, as in those days letters were not as frequent as now, and one was not as thoroughly acquainted with another's handwriting.

It certainly was a close imitation of her brother's writing, for it caused her to feel no doubt.

"You are from my brother's frigate?" she said.

"Yes, lady, and he sent me on the Petty Ellen to bear this to you."

"I should have been glad to have had Skipper Caldwell come ashore."

"He's not feeling just well, lady, or he would have done so; but he is anxious to get on his way again."

"My mother is away, and I must await her return; but I will in the mean time pack my chest and have all in readiness."

"May I offer you some refreshments?"

The sailor was willing, and he was accordingly asked into the house, for he was a most respectable-looking young fellow, while Eve began her preparations.

When her chest was ready, the messenger bore it down to the boat, while Eve turned to greet her mother, who just then drove up in the family carriage.

Reading the letter to her, Mrs. Lonsdale could not but consent to her daughter's going, while she said:

"I really hope you will have to remain some time, my child, as I would like to go there for a few weeks."

"I am not well, and wish to consult one of the town doctors."

"Why not go now, mother?"

"No, I will wait; but I will be very lonesome."

"I wonder what Leo can wish with you?"

"I do not know, mother; but I must be off, as I do not wish to detain the packet."

An affectionate farewell between the mother and daughter followed, and then Eve departed in the gathering twilight, little dreaming what was before her.

The messenger had already carried her chest out to the schooner, and returning, awaited her coming down to the wharf.

He aided her into the boat, which pulled away in the gathering darkness.

"Please enter the cabin, lady," said the messenger. Eve obeyed, the companionway closing behind her, and as it closed, she beheld the occupant there, for there was but one.

And that one sprung toward her, threw her arms about her neck, and said in a whisper:

"Embrace me and call me Belle Vernon, for I am supposed to be Miss Vernon."

"We are prisoners, and our kidnapper is a pirate!"

A low moan escaped the lips of Eve Lonsdale, and she sunk upon a settee, her face as white as a corpse.

CHAPTER XXXVII.

A MISTAKE.

CAPTAIN AMOS CALDWELL was a very sad man, when he was placed in the little boat with his crew.

He was three leagues away from the coast, but that was not what troubled him, for the sea was smooth and the wind light.

He had been cleverly tricked, and by the very pirate that had before captured the Pretty Ellen.

"He's vicious 'cause he's lost his hand, and he'll turn the Pretty Ellen into a pirit, I declare," said the skipper, as he saw his schooner sail away after the Spitfire.

"And he said, when he hailed that feller as nabbed us so clever, that he had Miss Belle Vernon aboard as a prisoner, and meant to git some one else, too," said Josh Nubbins, who acted as mate of the Pretty Ellen, or rather, had done so.

"That are so, Josh; but we can't make nothin' here on ther ocean, so let us git ashore and then hunt Bosting town, and maybe some o' them war-vessels may captu' ther bloody pirit yet."

"To think I were tuk in so complete, and were played fer a durn fool, as I is, to take them varmints fer honest country folk, and believe a man was a woman!"

"Lordy! if ther fool-killer were to come 'round he'd catch me sart'in, I declare," said the skipper.

"But pull fer Salem, lads, fer it lays jist yonder."

Two oarsmen set to work, and the boat moved slowly toward the shore.

But it was a long and hard pull; the tide was against them, and having but two oars they made slow progress.

When at last they reached Salem the sun was up, and tired out they sought a tavern to get breakfast.

Then Skipper Caldwell bought a mast and sail for the little boat, put some water and provisions on board, and the start was made for Boston.

Night had settled down as they sailed past the fort and were hailed.

Colonel Du Bose ordered the boat to run in to the water-stairs, and there heard the story of the skipper.

Skipper Caldwell also heard that the brig Belle of Blue Water had gone in search of the pirate, for, the Spitfire disappearing as she had, it was supposed she had been cut out by her former daring commander, though it was noon before it became known that no one from the war-vessels had gone out on her.

Getting into his barge and taking Skipper Caldwell with him, Colonel Du Bose started for the town, the sail-boat following, Josh Nubbins having been told by his captain to go and put up at the Seaman's Solace Inn, where he would join them.

"And you say that the pirate kidnapped Miss Vernon?" asked the colonel, as the dozen oarsmen sent the barge rapidly toward the city.

"Yes, sir."

"Strange that I did not hear of this; but we will soon know, for I wish you to go with me to see Admiral Fenton, who is not aware that the pirate captured your schooner, too."

"I declar' ter gracious he did, though, colonel!"

Landing at the wharf nearest the admiral's, the colonel led the way to the quarters, and learned that the naval commandant had gone out to Vernon Hall.

Then Colonel Du Bose went to Military Hall, where the aristocratic young bloods of the town and the navy and army officers were wont to congregate, and he found there Major Branscombe, whom he sought.

The young major was called out, and the skipper recognized him as having been the one to escort Eve Lonsdale to his vessel, along with Commodore Vernon and his daughter, the day that she had sailed for Sealands on the first voyage of the Pretty Ellen.

He quickly told his story, when the major said:

"There is a mistake about Miss Vernon's being on board, for I was there this afternoon; but she is in great distress over the mysterious disappearance of her pretty maid, Lurline, whom she is most fond of, as a companion rather than a servant."

"But let us go at once to Vernon Hall."

A walk of ten minutes brought them to the elegant home of the commodore, with its acres of ornamental grounds surrounding it, though really it was in the town limits.

Saunders, the butler, admitted them, and, anxious to hear tidings of her lost maid, Belle came quickly to the door.

She recognized Skipper Caldwell ere Major Branscombe had introduced him, and ushered them right into the parlor, where the admiral and the commodore were playing cards, and Captain Fenton had been entertaining her.

"Father, Colonel Du Bose and Major Branscombe; and you remember Skipper Caldwell of the Pretty Ellen, who has news for the admiral, I believe."

"Zounds! news on news! Ah, my fine fellow, you have news?" cried the admiral.

Skipper Caldwell was almost stunned at his surroundings, but he made several bows and then told his story.

"Then that explains poor Lurline's disappearance."

"She was kidnapped for me," cried Belle, with tears in her eyes.

"And that accounts for the strange carriage that drove in while we were away, and turned around over the flower-beds," the commodore remarked.

"I had left Lurline to await your coming, major, and ask you to join us at the Chathams, returning to tea with us, and the housekeeper said she went out upon the piazza, and then walked toward the gate, and that was the last seen of her."

"But cannot this daring pirate be taken?" and Belle Vernon glanced toward Captain Fenton.

"He oughter be, I declar' ter gracious he sh'd, fer he said he were goin' ter sail and git his other fair captive; them were his words, and to my thinkin' thet means Miss Lonsdale, fer I heerd them varmint as tuk my schooner say her name once, and speak o' Casco Bay."

"Heaven defend her! what if he has gone there!"

"Oh, Admiral Fenton, can nothing be done for the sister of Captain Lonsdale, and my poor Lurline?"

"I will go to sea to-night, Miss Vernon, with my kind father's permission," said Frank Fenton, looking unutterably strange at Belle for his great generosity, as he believed it, whereas,

with the fine vessel he commanded, and in perfect trim once more, he should have been at sea looking for enemies of his country.

"Do so, I implore you, Captain Fenton, and sail at once for Casco Bay, and I wish there was another vessel to go."

"If I could get a craft, and put some o' them Frenchman's guns on her, I'd go a privateer, durned quick, I declar' ter gracious I would," said Skipper Caldwell.

But the admiral did not accept of his services, and Captain Fenton at once took his leave to go to sea; but somehow Belle Vernon did not seem to have such faith in the young commander of the Saturn as he had in himself, for she said to Major Branscombe, as she bade him good-night:

"I feel he will do nothing."

"Oh! that the Fatal Frigate were here."

"He will be here soon, I hope, Miss Vernon, and woe be unto that pirate if he falls into the hands of Lionel Lonsdale," was the reply of the handsome dragoon, as he followed Colonel Du Bose and Skipper Caldwell, who had gone on ahead with Frank Fenton.

CHAPTER XXXVIII.

THE RUNNING FIGHT.

THE Saturn sailed, as Frank Fenton had promised Belle Vernon, the same night in search of the daring pirate.

That Captain Cutlass had come into port, or been there all the while since his escape from prison, for no one knew which, and had found another pirate crew to aid him in cutting out his former schooner, and also, by his allies, had captured the Pretty Ellen, was a disgrace to the guardians of the fort.

From the admiral down, the king's navy felt it, and Frank Fenton had been glad to escape to sea ere the dawn came and it was known just what had happened.

He had himself hailed the schooner on her way out, and been satisfied with the pirate's answer.

All the guardians of the port would naturally feel humiliated, and the secret would go like wildfire through the town, try as they might to keep it.

So it was that Frank Fenton had been anxious to sail before the dawn, and if he could capture the pirate and bring him back it would be a great feather in his cap.

If he could also rescue the maid of Belle Vernon, it would give him a deeper hold upon her affections than he could flatter himself he then possessed.

If he could rescue the sister of Lionel Lonsdale from the pirate's clutches, he would have a sweet revenge upon his rival and foe.

So thought Frank Fenton as he went along toward his frigate, and arriving on board he startled all by an energetic order to get ready for sea.

As some of his officers and men were ashore, he awoke the town firing signal guns for them to come at once on board, which they hastened to do.

Thus it was that the Saturn went out to sea under all the canvas that she would draw, and the town had been wakened up to let them know she was going.

It was the second day after her departure, and in the morning, when the deep boom of heavy guns was heard far out at sea.

All that could do so at once went to the points of observation about the town, and it was discovered that five vessels were coming toward the town.

After a glance at them through a powerful glass, Major Branscombe mounted his horse and rode rapidly toward Vernon Hall.

The commodore had just driven home from his office, to ask his daughter to go with him to a point which commanded a good view, telling her that he was certain that the Saturn was engaged with a French vessel some leagues out to sea.

This appeared to be the general belief; but when Major Bert Branscombe dashed up, Belle called out excitedly:

"Major Branscombe, what is the firing about?"

"I came to ask you and your father to drive over and see, for I think it well worth your while."

"Leave your horse here, Branscombe, and go in the carriage with us," said the commodore.

"Thank you, sir," and the major very gladly accepted.

"You know what it is?" said Belle, as they drove away.

"I had a glance through my glass, and it looked to me like a British frigate running before a foe."

"The Saturn! I'll wager my saddle horse," cried Belle.

"We will soon know," the major said with a smile.

The point sought by the Vernon carriage, at the suggestion of the major, was a hill that commanded a fine view of the harbor and sea beyond.

There was a signal station there, under the charge of a middy and two assistants, and as the carriage drove up the youngster saluted politely and said:

"A brave sight, sir, for a sailor and a soldier."

"What is it, Midshipman Morton?" asked the major.

"You see three ships, sir?"

"Yes."

"There is one in advance, alone, and she is heading for port."

"So I see."

"She is a frigate."

"Yes."

"She is British."

"I understand."

"There are four vessels in her wake, sailing broadside to each other, sir."

"I observe that."

"They are two frigates, a sloop-of-war and a brig, sir."

"Yes, Mr. Morton."

"They are French, sir."

"So I supposed."

"The vessel leading is running, but she is in no great hurry, sir, as she has none of her top-sails set, and she is firing rapidly, and with good aim from her stern guns upon her pursuers."

"She is fighting them while running?"

"Yes, sir."

"She is plucky."

"She is more than that, sir, as you will see in a moment, when you see her do what I did five times—there!"

As the midshipman spoke the leading vessel, which was running dead before the wind, was seen to wear around and deliver a broadside.

The effect could not be seen with the naked eye, but the middy already had his glass to his eye, and he cried out:

"There comes the signal from the fort, West, so set your colors as I read them, and let the admiral's signalman know."

"It reads:

"British frigate delivered her sixth broadside."

"This time the frigate to starboard caught it and appears hard hit, as she is dropping astern of her consorts."

"Bravo!" cried Major Branscombe, and he added, addressing the midshipman:

"She is making a stubborn fight, although against terrible odds."

"Yes, sir; I never saw a pluckier fight, for if she was dismayed she would be taken."

"What frigate is it, Midshipman Morton?" asked Belle.

"The Saturn, miss, so they signaled from the fort awhile ago."

"Then Fenton is redeeming himself for having been driven in before by the Frenchman that Lonsdale captured."

"Captain Fenton is not Captain Lonsdale, sir; but the admiral would turn me over if he heard me say so," and the middy laughed.

After a moment he continued:

"When I first saw the splendid fight the Britisher was making, I was sure it was the Ill Omen, but the signal came from the fort that it was the Saturn, and I was surprised."

"So am I, Mr. Morton," quietly said Belle Vernon.

"They are signaling from the fort, sir," said West, one of the middy's assistants.

The British craft again wore round, as the middy raised his glass to his eye, and once more poured in one of her terrible broadsides, while the Frenchmen were keeping up a hot fire the whole time, the roar of the heavy guns being continuous.

"Bravo! I thought so! See! That knocks the brig out of the fight, for she is dismayed, and the frigate got it so hard that she has dropped astern," cried the middy.

Then he fairly shouted:

"What is that signal?"

"By the beard of Neptune! But listen to what the fort signals."

Those in the carriage held their breath, for the middy's face showed intense excitement as he said:

"The signal reads:

"Was mistaken."

"The British frigate is not the Saturn."

"It is glorious Lonsdale, in his Haunted Cruiser!"

CHAPTER XXXIX.

SAD TIDINGS.

THE announcement of the midshipman caused the face of Belle Vernon to flush and pale with excitement, while Major Bert Branscombe cried:

"I knew it all the time, for before I went for you, I was sure that my strong glass had deceived me, while it was just like Lonsdale and unlike Fenton, though I do not reflect on his courage."

"Bless my soul, major, but Lonsdale! tremendous chances to add to his fame as the commodore."

"And he will add to it, sir, for just see with what bulldog courage he fights back his foes, running with a dogged defiance that makes him a victor."

"Yes, the frigate has slackened her speed for repairs, and the brig is out of the fight, that is certain."

"The frigate and the sloop remain, and I verily believe, if he could cripple the others so

they could not come up, Lonsdale would fight his two remaining adversaries."

"Heaven grant he does not attempt it."

"But, oh! what a story of sorrow he must have when he arrives," said Belle.

Watching the combat, they saw that the crippled brig and frigate had repaired damages, and were again coming on, and yet the Haunted Cruiser, as people had begun to call the Ill Omen, was safe, for she was running in toward the fort.

"The frigate is signaling the fort," cried the middy.

"What does he say?" asked Major Branscombe.

"The fort now signals us—yes, they say:

"The frigate has signaled that he will take position near the fort and open fire on the French fleet as it comes up.

"He also asks if the Saturn is in port, and if so for her to come out with the pirate schooner Spitfire and the privateer Belle of Blue Water, and they can capture or sink the French fleet."

"Brave Lonsdale!" cried the major.

"He little knows that the Spitfire is under her old master, and my brig has gone in search of the pirate," the commodore said.

"There is nothing in port to go out to aid him, then?" Belle remarked, indignantly.

"The fort has signaled that the schooner and brig are not here, and Captain Lonsdale has responded:

"Send out the Saturn, and we will attack them," the middy remarked.

"Poor fellow! he knows no fear," the major said.

"The fort has now signaled that the Saturn is not in port, and to expect no aid, so the Haunted Cruiser is running to a position to fight them back with the fort," Midshipman Morton explained.

In a short while the Ill Omen had taken a position broadside across the channel, and as the French fleet drew near, she opened a heavy fire, in which the fort rapidly joined.

The French fleet, however, seemed not inclined for a combat, and after firing a broadside from each vessel, drew off and sailed away.

Then the Haunted Cruiser, as if in defiance, stood out to sea a league after the Frenchmen, and again returned to port, sailing slowly and showing evidence that she had suffered considerably in her unequal combat.

Then the Vernon carriage rolled rapidly homeward, where Major Branscombe mounted his horse to ride down and meet Lionel Lonsdale and break to him the sad news of his sister's capture by the One-Armed Buccaneer.

Slowly did the Haunted Cruiser come into port, the fort saluting her as she went by, and her pilot headed her for an anchorage near the upper end of the harbor.

Hardly had her anchor dropped when a boat came alongside and Major Bert Branscombe sprung on deck.

Her captain was in his cabin, preparing to go ashore and make his report, and thither the dragon sought him.

They clasped hands with a warmth that showed their friendship, and the young soldier said:

"Lonsdale, it was magnificent, for you kept those fellows at bay in spite of their driving you."

"You remember I went to find the French pet, and I did."

"They were bunched together, and I found them at dawn one morning unpleasantly near."

"I found that they were cruising northward, and I put about."

"All four gave chase and I discovered that the Haunted Frigate was more than a master for them in speed, while my long range pivot guns astern carried further than any of their bow pieces."

"This was just what I wanted, and I kept a safe distance, firing steadily."

"They kept up the chase under full sail, while I had just enough canvas set to hold my own, and they have been after me since yesterday morning."

"I ran for port, hoping the Saturn was here, and that the schooner Spitfire and the commodore's privateer brig were here, for with the three to help me, I could, I think, have captured the French fleet."

"I do not doubt it."

"But where are those three vessels?"

"The Saturn and the brig have sailed to find the Spitfire, which was retaken by her old commander," and Major Branscombe nerved himself to tell the worst.

"What! one-armed as he is, did Captain Lonsdale capture his schooner?"

"Yes, he cut her out of the harbor one night in a clever style."

"That is not possible."

"Well, it is, for he got a crew from somewhere, boarded her, and when hailed by Fenton and the Ennebec packet schooner, which had sailed a few hours before I believe, and on board of which was a prisoner to be brought back."

"The clever rascal."

"Well, Lonsdale, to end a long story, he had been on board the Pretty Ellen in the guise of a passenger, and they seized her and putting

Skipper Caldwell and his crew in a small boat, the two schooners sailed away together."

"Remarkable."

"But before going it seemed the intention of the Cuban Corsair to make Miss Vernon captive, to get a large ransom from her father."

"He did not know Miss Vernon, it seems, but drove up to Vernon Hall in a carriage, and kidnapped Lurline, Miss Belle's pretty maid, carrying her off for her mistress."

"And Miss Vernon?" asked Lionel Lonsdale in a low tone.

"Is safe, but greatly distressed about poor Lurline, and also in dread that the revengeful pirate has paid a visit to your home."

Lionel Lonsdale was on his feet in an instant, and then he said:

"I cannot put to sea in my frigate under twenty-four hours, as she needs repairs, as you doubtless observed, but then I will go at once in chase of that pirate."

The major then explained that Captain Fenton in the Saturn, and the Belle of Blue Water had gone in chase, and advised Lonsdale to make his report to the admiral, while his crew was at once set to work upon repairing the Haunted Cruiser.

Going on deck the young captain gave his orders to repair the frigate with all haste, and to allow no one from the vessel to go ashore, or any boat to board her in his absence.

Then he accompanied Major Branscombe ashore and was received with deafening cheers by the crowd.

Raising his hat in acknowledgment, he hastened on, and soon entered the admiral's quarters.

The old admiral received the two officers at once, and his greeting of Lonsdale was most kind.

"You ran off in your haunted craft just as I had determined to give you the Saturn, my young friend; but, as it has turned out, I am glad that you did so."

"I have to thank you, in the name of the king and for myself, for the distinguished services you have rendered, and in behalf of his Majesty, as the power within me lies to represent him in this colony, I shall issue a pardon to all your crew on condition that they serve you as long as you require their services."

"I thank you, Admiral Fenton, most kindly, and I will read that pardon to them upon my return on board ship."

"But now I am most anxious to get to sea at the earliest moment, in search of that Cuban Corsair, and I shall not enter port again until I have found him."

"I vow it!"

Having had from the admiral the official pardon for his crew, Lionel Lonsdale accompanied Major Branscombe to Vernon Hall, where a warm welcome awaited the gallant sailor, the young soldier doing all in his power to entertain the old commodore, and leaving the pleasant task to his friend of talking to Miss Vernon.

After an hour passed at Vernon Hall the two friends departed, stopping in at Military Hall to see the officers and citizens gathered there, and to learn if aught else had been heard of the daring pirate, for somehow news went first to that social headquarters, and from there went forth as "rumors," or "gossip."

CHAPTER XL.

AN UNEXPECTED CHALLENGE.

WHEN Major Branscombe entered Military Hall, accompanied by Captain Lionel Lonsdale, a great shout of welcome arose.

It had been generally believed that Captain Lonsdale would drop into the gay assembly-rooms during the evening, and consequently a vast crowd had gone there to see him.

It was already known that the admiral had pardoned the convict crew of the Haunted Cruiser, and the lion of the day was her daring commander.

Since his capture of the Spitfire, just after sailing with his convict crew, they had not seen Lonsdale in town, and his other victories had won for him the greatest admiration.

As he stepped into the main saloon he was completely taken aback to see the large assemblage rise as one man, while a voice rung out:

"Three cheers for the Wizard of the Waves!"

And such cheers as were given made the old house shake, and the glasses on the sideboards rattled an accompaniment.

Doffing his hat, Lionel Lonsdale bowed low and passed on toward an inner room, where Major Branscombe had asked him to join him in a bottle of wine with several friends, among whom was Colonel Du Bose, the commandant of the fort.

As they entered the room, some one stepped quickly forward and touched Lonsdale on the arm.

Turning, to his surprise he beheld a face well known to him.

It was a face he had not expected to see there, however, and which brought up painful memories.

"Mr. Leslie! I am glad to see you, for I have twice sought you at Castle Bleak," he said, at the same time speaking in a sad, subdued tone and extending his hand.

It was Enrique Leslie, the master of Castle Bleak, the father of the unfortunate Lola who had sprung from the cliff.

To his science Lionel Lonsdale owed his life, when he was carried desperately wounded to Castle Bleak.

But Enrique Leslie did not take the proffered hand.

His dark face was ashen in its paleness, and his lips were sternly set, while his eyes burned with a wicked light.

"Captain Lonsdale, I am glad to see you, for I came here for that purpose. A word with you, please."

"Certainly; will you step into this adjoining room?" said Lonsdale, coldly, as Mr. Leslie refused to take his hand.

"Pardon me a moment, gentlemen," said Lonsdale, to Branscombe and the others.

"Will not your friend join us, Captain Lonsdale?" politely said Major Branscombe, who saw that the stranger was a very distinguished looking person.

"No, thank you."

"My business with Captain Lonsdale will soon be arranged, and then he is at liberty," coldly said Mr. Leslie.

When the two had entered the little room Lionel Lonsdale said:

"Be seated, Mr. Leslie, and tell me why you refuse my hand."

"Because, sir, you are the murderer of my child," and the words were hissed from the man's lips.

"Be careful, Mr. Leslie, for I am not one to stand such accusations."

"They are true."

"They are false, and I wish you to hear me."

"I have your letter."

"Then you know all."

"I do."

"And accuse me of murder?"

"Yes."

"And why?"

"Lola loved you."

"I am sorry such was the case."

"You should have made her your wife."

"I am the best judge of that, sir."

"Then you should not have won her love."

"Upon my honor, Mr. Leslie, I did nothing to win her love."

"She loved you, you would not marry her, and hence you are her murderer."

"That is strange reasoning, sir."

"It is my reasoning."

"I see, sir, that you are in a humor to look at matters in a different light from what they are, so I will bid you good-night."

"Hold on, Captain Lonsdale."

"Well, sir?"

"Lola was all I had to love, and, as you caused her death, you shall answer to me for it."

"Mr. Leslie, you are mad."

"I am mad enough to make you do as I say."

"I will not meet you."

"Will not?"

"No, for you were most kind to me, and I owe you my life."

"My child was indebted to you for more than life."

"And I owe to her the saving of my vessel and crew from wreck."

"Your debt was canceled by her acts, and mine, so no sentimental nonsense shall stand in the way of your fighting me."

"I will not."

"You shall."

"Mr. Leslie, be a man and cease this strife."

"You refuse?"

"I do."

"Do you fear me?"

"No."

"Are you a coward?"

"Let my past life answer that."

"Then take that!"

As he spoke the infuriated man struck Lionel Lonsdale lightly in the face with his glove.

The sailor turned very white, but said with the utmost calmness:

"Even you have gone too far, Mr. Leslie."

"Name your friend, sir, and mine shall call on him."

"I have no friend, but as you associate with gentlemen let one of your companions act for me."

"Will you be satisfied?"

"Yes."

"Then come with me."

Enrique Leslie obeyed, and entering the room where the three officers sat waiting, Lionel Lonsdale said:

"Gentlemen, permit me to introduce Mr. Leslie."

All bowed.

"And Branscombe, I am going to ask of you the favor of befriending Mr. Leslie in an affair of honor, as he has no friend in the town."

"Certainly, Lonsdale."

"And, Colonel Du Bose, I must ask your kindly services in behalf of myself."

"What, in a duel, Lonsdale?"

"Yes, with Mr. Leslie."

Had the Haunted Cruiser suddenly sent a broadside into the town, it could not have caused more surprise to these three officers than did the words of Lonsdale.

"Mr. Leslie has a fancied cause of quarrel with me, and will not be pacified, so I have consented to meet him; so I leave the matter in your hands, colonel."

"And I leave my honor in your hands, Major Branscombe."

"I will be in the outer room, sir," and Enrique Leslie left the party alone.

CHAPTER XLI.

THE PARDON.

THAT all present with Lionel Lonsdale were surprised at what had occurred need not be said.

Who Mr. Leslie was they did not know.

He looked the gentleman, but he had seemed in a very wicked mood toward Lonsdale, though courteous to all.

"You really wish me to act for that gentleman, against you?" asked Major Branscombe, when Enrique Leslie had left the room.

"Certainly, for he had no one to call upon, and I felt that you would do me the kindness to serve him, as he demands that I meet him."

"I will do so with pleasure, Lonsdale, and I suppose you refer me to Colonel Du Bose?"

"Yes, if the colonel says he will serve me."

"Gladly, Lonsdale; but who challenges?"

"I do, as he forced me to do so."

"And your weapons?" and Colonel Du Bose turned to Major Branscombe.

"Egad, I do not know."

"I must see the gentleman," and he left the room.

In a short while he returned, and he and Colonel Du Bose walked apart together, and after holding a whispered conference, the major again left the room.

Upon his return he addressed a few words to Colonel Du Bose, and the latter said:

"It is arranged for to-morrow at sunrise, on the cedar point, where you fought Fenton, Captain Lonsdale, and the weapons are to be swords."

"I am content, so now let us drop the unpleasant subject?" rejoined Lonsdale, and an hour was passed very pleasantly, when the commander of the Haunted Cruiser bade his friends good-night and departed, Colonel Du Bose going with him, and accepting his invitation to remain as guest in the frigate until the morning.

Arriving on board Lionel Lonsdale saw that the crew had been working with a will, and the prospects were that the frigate could sail the next afternoon.

"There has been a gentleman to see you, sir," said Robert Manly.

"Who was he, Mr. Manly?"

"He did not come on board, sir, as such were your orders, but he rowed out in a shore-boat and said it was most important for him to see you."

"Was his name Leslie?"

"Yes, sir."

"I have seen him, thank you," and then Lionel Lonsdale gave orders to have all the crew called on deck.

This was done, and glancing over the upturned faces, as they stood there in silence, the young captain said:

"Men, I hold here a paper which is a pardon from the admiral for one and all of you, if you are content to remain on the frigate and serve me until I honorably discharge you."

"What say you, lads?"

The wild cheers that broke from the crew at the words of their commander awakened many a sleeping citizen ashore, and for a few moments the men seemed almost beside themselves with joy.

Then holding up his hand for silence, Lionel Lonsdale said:

"Men, you have well earned your pardon, and from this day you are no longer convicts and pirates in the eye of the law, but free men and honest tars aboard a king's ship."

"Now to your work, for the Ill Omen must sail to-morrow afternoon, and she has an urgent duty to perform, for the Cuban Corsair is again afloat, and upon the deck of his own schooner, the Spitfire."

"He must be hunted from the seas."

Again the men gave a cheer, and Lionel Lonsdale led the colonel, who had been an interested spectator of the scene, into his cabin, where Brandy soon had a substantial supper for them.

"Brandy, I wish an early cup of coffee, and my gig ready at dawn."

"Yes, sir."

"Call the colonel and myself in ample time, for the matter is of importance."

"I will, massa."

Then the captain showed his guest to his state-room, and going into another state-room, he said:

"Are you asleep, Lieutenant Harold?"

"No, sir, for I heard you come on board," was the answer of the officer, as he rose from his bunk.

"I have a pardon for one and all on the frigate, and of course you are included, Harold."

"I thank you, sir."

"I will sail to-morrow afternoon for the vicinity of my home, as I have just learned that Captain Cutlass, the Cuban Corsair, in spite of your having deprived him of his good right

hand, is again afloat, having cut out his schooner, and, worse still, he kidnapped Miss Vernon's maid, by mistake for her mistress, and I fear has gone to my home to make my sister a prisoner."

"Under these circumstances I will ask you to await our return before I act upon your matter."

"Gladly, sir, and I hope we can soon get away after the pirate."

"I expect, as I said, to sail to-morrow afternoon; but you had better remain in your state-room until you get out to sea, for you are reported on the sick list."

"I will, sir, and I can take you to the haunt of the pirate."

"I felt that you could; but now good-night," and Lonsdale retired to his own state-room and was soon fast asleep, as though the deadly affair appointed for the morning weighed lightly upon him.

CHAPTER XLII.

THE DUEL.

BRANDY was not one to make a mistake, and promptly on time he called his master and his guest.

He had a cup of hot coffee and light breakfast ready, and after partaking of it, he, at the direction of his master, picked up a suspicious-looking box and some swords wrapped in buckskin, and followed the captain and the colonel on deck.

The captain's gig was alongside, with four oarsmen and a coxswain, and entering it they were rowed away.

The East was growing crimson with the approaching sun, when the captain, his second, and Brandy stepped out upon the sandy shore of a wooded point of land in a secluded part of the harbor.

A walk of a hundred yards brought them to an open space, which Lionel Lonsdale knew well, for there he had fought a duel with Frank Fenton, first with swords, then with pistols.

Hardly had they reached the spot, when a carriage came in sight, and stopping near, three persons alighted.

One was Major Bert Branscombe, another a surgeon of the dragoon regiment, and the third was Enrique Leslie.

The latter was stern and silent, and walked toward the group awaiting him, raising his hat with cold politeness as he did so.

He too had brought swords and pistols, and the weapons were quickly opened by the two seconds.

Lonsdale stood apart, talking to Brandy, while Colonel Du Bose was arranging the preliminaries with Major Branscombe, but when called stepped quickly to his stand.

Enrique Leslie had grasped his sword with the air of a man who meant that it should do deadly work for him.

His eyes fairly burned with hatred, but otherwise his face was motionless.

"Permit me, gentlemen, to say before you all that this duel is not of my seeking," said Lionel Lonsdale quietly, and with the look of a man who was being driven to do an unpleasant task.

"No, it is of my seeking, gentlemen."

"I have come here to kill Captain Lonsdale," came in measured tones from Enrique Leslie, and they made these who heard them shudder, excepting Lonsdale, who was wholly unmoved.

Having been placed in position, and the weapons handed to them the adversaries stood watching each other in silence.

Enrique Leslie held his hand up, and sword on guard, while Lonsdale rested his hilt against his hip.

Suddenly, seeing that Lonsdale made no feint, Leslie quickly did so.

But his blade met one that was held in an iron hand, and he seemed surprised at the skill and strength of his opponent before a dozen passes were made.

All could see that Enrique Leslie, though clad as a civilian, handled a weapon as one who had seen service, and deadly service at that.

He fought like a sailor, determined to give deadly thrusts, and expecting to receive them.

Finding, as he soon did, that Lonsdale would only act on the defensive, he began to press him hard.

But not an inch did the sailor give.

All were surprised at the skill and rapidity of Leslie's movements, but one at least, Branscombe, felt no anxiety as far as Lonsdale was concerned.

"I mean to kill you," hissed Leslie through his set teeth.

Lonsdale made no reply, his face did not change, but, as though to show his foe that he was at his mercy, he suddenly, by a most skillful movement, disarmed him, sending his sword flying ten paces distant.

A cry of rage broke from Enrique Leslie's lips at his defeat, and rushing for his sword he picked it up and was springing to attack his adversary again, when Colonel Du Bose and Major Branscombe interposed, the latter saying, sternly:

"No, Mr. Leslie, I will not permit this."

"He shall die!" cried the infuriated man.

"Stand aside, gentlemen, and let him come on," cried Lonsdale.

Instantly Enrique Leslie rushed forward, and once more the combat waged with fury.

The face of Leslie was flushed with rage, that of Lonsdale colorless and stern.

He seemed to have made up his mind to some course, for suddenly he struck up the blade of his foe, and let the point of his own weapon pass through and through the sword arm of his enraged enemy.

The weapon of Enrique Leslie fell from his grasp, and as Lonsdale quickly withdrew his blade from the wound, he turned on his heel and walked away.

The dragoon surgeon started quickly toward him, but he hastened his steps, sprung into the carriage and the driver drove furiously off, leaving Major Branscombe and his brother officer with Lonsdale and Colonel Du Bose.

"Well, he surpasseth my understanding, and, Captain Lonsdale, in behalf of my principal, I thank you for his life, as you certainly had just cause to kill him," said Major Branscombe.

"Poor fellow! he has a heavy grief to bear, and I pity him."

"But, come, major, you and Surgeon Moore, and return to the frigate to breakfast with me."

The invitation was gladly accepted, and the party sought the boat, and soon after were in the handsome cabin of the Haunted Cruiser.

As they arose from the breakfast table, Mr. Manly reported a sail coming in, and going on deck it was discovered to be the Belle of Blue Water.

"Now we shall have news," said Colonel Du Bose, and the brig was signaled to send a boat aboard the frigate as soon as she dropped anchor.

CHAPTER XLIII.

THE FRIGATE GOES ON THE HUNT.

WHEN the brig was signaled from the deck of the Haunted Cruiser to send a boat aboard, the answering signal came back:

"Mrs. Lonsdale is on board, and would be glad to see Captain Lonsdale on the brig."

At once Lionel Lonsdale sprung into a boat and boarding the brig, entered her cabin.

His mother was there and greeted him most affectionately, while she said:

"I took advantage of the brig's calling at Sealands, to learn of your whereabouts, my son, to come to Portland to join Eve, though I hardly expected to find you here."

"Join Eve, mother?" and the words fell hoarsely from the lips of the young sailor.

"Yes, my son."

"Did you not leave Eve at home, or is she not with you, mother?"

"My son, has she not reached here yet?"

"Reached here?"

"Yes, she sailed in the Pretty Ellen to join you."

"The Pretty Ellen?"

"Yes, Lionel, according to your letter."

"Heaven have mercy!"

"Mother, I wrote no letter. Eve has been entrapped, for the Pretty Ellen was captured."

"Oh, Lionel, my son! then your sister is in the hands of the French?"

Lionel Lonsdale wished that his mother might so believe, but the honest though thoughtless skipper of the brig blurted out:

"Worse than that, mum, for the Pretty Ellen was captured by that bloody One-Armed Buccaneer."

A groan from Mrs. Lonsdale, and she would have fallen upon the floor, had not the strong arm of her son upheld her.

She had fainted.

Bearing her to a sofa the son used what means he could to restore her, while he bade the skipper, now thoroughly alarmed at the result of his words, to hail the frigate and ask Surgeon English to come at once on board.

This was done, and with him arrived Commodore Vernon.

Hearing the situation of affairs, he at once said:

"Lonsdale, you must bring your mother at once to my house."

"I will send for my carriage, and tell Belle to have all prepared for her—no, I will not have you say nay, for I mean it. Your mother will need every care, and at Vernon Hall she can get it, and you will feel more at ease regarding her, for you must go after your poor sister, as all depends upon that."

Lionel Lonsdale was persuaded to do as the good-hearted commodore said, and an hour after Mrs. Lonsdale, recovered from her swoon, bowed down in grief, went ashore and entered the Vernon carriage.

The commodore, her son, and Surgeon English accompanied her, and the sympathetic welcome she received from Belle made her feel at least at home.

"I will have our doctor come now, as you will need Surgeon English with you, Lonsdale, and you may feel that all will be done for your mother that we can do."

"I well know that, commodore."

"Now I will go on board my ship, and when all is ready to sail I will return to say good-by."

Returning to his vessel, accompanied by the surgeon, Lonsdale found the men working like beavers.

They realized just what they had to do, and were doing it with a will and energy that showed their sympathy for and love of their daring commander.

When the vessel was about ready to sail, Lonsdale drove rapidly to Vernon Hall, and at once sought his mother's room.

She was delightfully situated, and everything had been done for her comfort that it was possible to do, but the blow had been a bitter one, indeed.

The letter received by Eve Mrs. Lonsdale fortunately had picked up from the table, and happened to have put it into her pocket, so that Lionel read it.

"It is a clever forgery of my handwriting, so the fellow must have gotten some letters of mine somewhere, to have imitated it so well.

"But cheer up, mother, for Lurline, the maid of Miss Vernon, is with Eve, and ransom is what the pirate wants, and he shall have it—in iron, steel and lead," and the last words were muttered rather than spoken.

Bidding his mother good-by, and telling her he would bring Eve back, Lionel Lonsdale left her in tears.

As he descended the broad stairway he was met by Belle, who bade him feel no anxiety regarding his mother.

"I will not, I assure you, Miss Lonsdale, for you are kindness itself.

"I hope soon to return with my sister and your maid, and give you the knowledge that the pirate has suffered for his crimes.

"But let me say to you now how much I thank you for all of your noble trust in me through the shadows that came upon me.

"Branscombe has told me that you were most loyal in your friendship, and the promise you gave me once, to trust me through all, I feel that you have more than kept.

"I cannot say more now—good-by!"

This was all that he had ever said to cause her to feel that he loved her; but it was enough, and she felt that some day he would say more.

He bent over and kissed her hand in farewell, and half an hour after the Haunted Cruiser was sailing seaward, wafted on her way by the good wishes of thousands who lined the shores and saluted by the fort as she passed.

Once she was out of the harbor she was seen to head southward, and Major Bert Branscombe, who had with a number of other officers sailed in her as far as the fort when the colonel's barge took them off, said to his comrades:

"I shall even pity that pirate when Lonsdale captures him, for I never saw him in such deadly earnest."

"He has a way of being in earnest in all he does," responded Colonel Du Bose.

And the cheers were given for "The Wizard of the Waves" by the soldiers of the fort, who were watching the receding frigate.

CHAPTER XLIV.

THE CAPTIVES.

At the words of Lurline, which made known to her the awful truth of how she had been deceived, Eve Lonsdale was for a moment overcome.

She gave a low moan and sunk down upon the settee in the cabin of the Pretty Ellen.

But Lurline quickly said:

"Be brave, Miss Lonsdale, for we are held for ransom."

With the same spirit as her mother, Eve rallied quickly, and at once cast off the feeling of despair and horror that had seized upon her.

"I will be brave, Lur—"

"Belle, remember—I am Miss Belle Vernon now, for no one on board knows the difference, and let me keep the secret, as it will save her."

"You are a dear, brave girl, Lur—I mean Belle, and we will not despair, will we?"

"No, indeed, Miss Eve—"

"There, it is your mistake now, for you must call me Eve."

Eve had seen Lurline the day she visited at Vernon Hall, and had then been struck by her pretty face and pleasant manners.

Belle had told her that Lurline was the daughter of a boatswain on one of her father's ships, and an only child, had taken the position of maid to her, and that she was a noble girl, pretty, well educated and very lady-like, and that she was very much attached to her.

As the two sat in the cabin together, Lurline told Eve of how she had been kidnapped, and that Captain Cutlass had mistaken her for Belle Vernon, and that her father, as he put it, should pay a round ransom for her restoration to him.

"I carried on the deception, Miss—Eve,

thinking it would keep him from going back to Boston and capturing Miss Belle, for he is capable of anything."

"And he is the same wretch that captured me before, you say?"

"Yes."

"His right hand was cut off in the duel between his handsome lieutenant and himself, and he was taken to prison in Boston, but you say escaped?"

"Yes, and killed old Captain Stone, the keeper, in making his escape, while he either also killed the guard or took him with him."

"He is a perfect monster; but my brother will be upon his track when he knows what has happened."

"I am so glad that he kidnapped me, Eve, instead of Miss Belle, and that I am here to be company for you."

"You are a dear good girl—Belle—there, I will soon get to calling you Belle, for neither of us must make any mistake in the name before that red-handed wretch."

As Eve spoke a knock came upon the companionway, and Lurline called out promptly:

"Come in!"

It was Captain Cutlass who entered, and saluting the two maidens politely, he said:

"Miss Lonsdale, you know by this time, from Miss Vernon, that you are a captive of the Cuban Corsair, for I suppose you recognize me as one whom you have met before?"

"I remember you, sir, as the pirate, who lost his hand for insulting me," was the calm retort.

"Yes, my right hand has gone, as you see," and he held up the stump of the arm.

"You seem to have been very fortunate in saving your neck thus far, from the hangman's noose."

"And will continue to be, Miss Lonsdale, for I was not born to be hanged."

"The truth is I am not as black as I am painted."

"You could not be blacker in my estimation."

The pirate frowned.

This, then, was the girl he had expected to win the love of.

He certainly had begun in a bad way.

He was an attractive-looking man, very.

Thirty-five years of age, perhaps; with splendid eyes, regular features, and a mouth that when not contorted with evil thoughts, was very winning in its expression.

To the casual observer, with his handsome form and easy manners at times, he would have been very attractive, but to one who studied his face the cloven foot of his nature would be revealed.

His dress was that of a dandy, for it was more than elegant, and he wore a fortune in precious stones.

His laces, on bosom and wrists, were of the finest kind, a ruby of vast size sparkling in the former, and his handless arm had been gracefully looped to a button on his breast.

His uniform was rich, covered with gold lace, enough for an admiral, and to his right side hung a cutlass of rare workmanship, the hilt being of gold and studded with precious stones.

Lieutenant Harold, who had cut off his hand, had appropriated his other golden-hilted cutlass, but he had gotten a second one upon his visit to his retreat, and had a skilled worker in gold and jewel setting, change the hilt to suit his left hand.

Altogether Captain Cutlass was an attractive and remarkable-looking personage.

In the heart of Eve Lonsdale and Lurline he excited only loathing and horror, for his crimes upon American waters had caused terror for years.

"Well, young ladies, I am now running to a harbor where I shall rejoin my old schooner, and I shall transfer her battery and full armament to this vessel, which is faster than the Spitfire.

"Then I shall sail in her to my retreat in southern seas, where you are to remain captive until it is decided what shall be done in the way of ransom."

"If you would only send word of your price, sir, it would be paid without taking us so far away," said Eve.

"I prefer to take you to my island home, and then arrange for your ransom."

"We are at your mercy, sir," said Eve.

"I will respect your being so, and this cabin shall be devoted to you exclusively.

"I will regret to disturb you for a day, with the noise of bringing the guns on board, but after that all will be well, for both vessels will sail for the retreat, and there you will be well taken care of.

"If you need anything you have but to ask, and I shall place a young lad I have on board at your service as a servant, so that no one else need intrude.

"Good-night, ladies."

Captain Cutlass bowed himself out most gracefully, casting a glance at Eve that he meant should impress her, and which did, though not as he had hoped, and the two were left alone.

Soon after a bright-faced lad of seventeen, a young Coast Gypsy, appeared, and began to set the table for supper.

The repast was a good one, and in spite of their situation, both Eve and Lurline ate with relish.

During the night the Pretty Ellen, or rather *Pretty Pirate*, as Captain Cutlass now called the schooner, reached the haven where the Spitfire awaited her, and in the morning early the fair inmates of the cabin were awakened by voices and heavy sounds on deck.

Looking from the cabin window they saw that the Spitfire and *Pretty Pirate* lay side by side, in a secure, landlocked anchorage, and they knew that the guns of the pirate-craft were being transferred to the captured packet.

"Oh, if the Ill Omen would only run in here now," said Eve.

"Captain Lonsdale will yet bring that cruel man to the yard-arm, Eve," said Lurline, so do not despair.

"I feel for my poor mother, when she knows all.

"She is not well and the shock will kill her," and the tears dimmed the eyes of the poor girl, as her thoughts went back to Sealand and her poor mother's grief when she knew that her daughter was the captive of a pirate.

CHAPTER XLV.

UGLY RUMORS.

When Major Branscombe dropped into the Military Hall, with Colonel Du Bose, the evening of the sailing of the Haunted Cruiser in chase of the pirate, he was surprised to be asked by several, in a confidential way:

"What about that duel of Lonsdale's, this morning?"

The major had supposed the duel was unknown outside of those who had been upon the scene, and he asked quietly:

"To what duel do you refer?"

"The rumor is around that Lonsdale and a stranger fought a duel this morning."

"With what result?"

"That Lonsdale wounded the stranger."

"Who was the stranger, Lennox?"

"I do not know his name."

"He is said," spoke up a young civilian, "to be a man whose daughter Lonsdale's desertion of caused her to take her life."

"Indeed!" said the major, and not having himself heard the story of why Enrique Leslie had fought with the captain of the Haunted Cruiser, he was surprised that others should assume a reason for the duel.

So he sought out Colonel Du Bose, who had passed on into the assembly-room and motioned him to follow him.

They went into the little room where the scene had occurred between Lonsdale and Leslie.

"Du Bose, the duel is known."

"So I have just found out from a dozen or more."

"Who told of it?"

"I am sure I do not know."

"I have kept silent."

"And I."

"I wonder if my surgeon could have been so indiscreet?"

"I saw him in the assembly-room just now."

"I will send for him."

A servant was dispatched for the surgeon, who said emphatically:

"I have not breathed a word; but maybe the driver did."

"He secured the carriage next door at the tavern," said Colonel Du Bose.

The driver was at once sent for.

He was an honest-faced Englishman, and when questioned said:

"No, major, I was paid four guineas to hold my tongue and nobody has offered me five to tell."

"Where did you drive the gentleman after he left the ground?"

"To Doctor Norton's house, sir."

"He had his wound dressed there?"

"Yes, sir; and a bad one it was, for the sword had gone clean through, scratching the bone, the doctor said."

"And then?"

"I brought the gentleman back to the tavern, sir, and getting his baggage I took him down to the Portland packet, sir, which was to sail at sunset, sir."

"Thank you, my man," and the major added another guinea to the four that Leslie had given him.

"You think he has told the truth?"

"Yes, colonel."

"I do also."

"He said he had been given four guineas for silence, and no one had made it five to talk."

"I see, and no one that I can conceive of would," Colonel Du Bose said.

"No, as Captain Frank Fenton is not here," was the dry reply.

"We must trace this rumor if we can, major, for it reflects upon us to have the affair known."

"Do you think, Colonel Du Bose, that that man would make it known?"

"Leslie?"

"Yes."

"Hardly, if he gave that driver four guineas to keep quiet about it."

"And the doctor?"

"Ah, he may have told him, and not as a secret."

"The driver might know."

The driver was again sent for.

"My man, did you go in with the gentleman, when you were at the doctor's?"

"Yes, sir."

"And remained there?"

"Yes, sir, for the gentleman was that weak from loss of blood, I had to support him."

"I see."

"But after the doctor dressed the wound and gave him a dose of medicine, he seemed braced up."

"Did he tell the doctor how he got the wound?"

"He said he had gotten it in a bout with a man who was the best swordsman he had ever met."

"He mentioned no names?"

"No sir."

"Did the doctor ask him any questions?"

"He asked if it was in a duel?"

"And the reply?"

"Yes, with a man I meant to kill, and will yet."

"That was the reply?"

"Yes, sir."

Another guinea was given the man, with the injunction to keep quiet upon the subject, and he left seeming to have the hope in his face that he would be sent for again, for he muttered gleefully:

"Three months wages in one day."

For awhile the friends discussed the matter, and then came the question:

"Is it known that we were participants?"

"Captain Ruth would know, for he spoke to me upon the subject," said the colonel.

A servant was sent to fetch Captain Ruth.

"Ruth, will you kindly tell Branscombe and myself, what this rumor is about a duel that Lonsdale had with a stranger this morning?"

Captain Ruth smiled as he said:

"As you, colonel, and Major Branscombe are said to have been the seconds in the affair, I should think any information I could give would be valueless."

"May I ask what you heard, then, and how you heard it?"

"Certainly."

"You know I am acting adjutant now for the admiral, and while a number of officers were there late this afternoon, a letter came by an orderly."

"It was given to the admiral, who handed it to me to read."

"And its contents?"

"Simply that a duel had been fought that morning between Captain Lionel Lonsdale of the Haunted Cruiser, and an American

gentleman whose daughter Lonsdale had cruelly jilted.

"It also stated that the stranger was wounded, and that you, colonel, and the major here, were the seconds."

"That was all?"

"Yes, sir, and as the admiral made no secret of it, it became at once gossip upon every lip."

"I thank you, Captain Ruth, and I would say that there was a duel fought as stated, but that Lonsdale had wronged any girl I am sure is false."

"I was Lonsdale's second, and Branscombe acted for the stranger; but in the absence of my friend, Captain Lonsdale, I shall deem it my duty to resent any slur cast upon his conduct as a gentleman and a king's officer, and you may so state to those you hear bandying this gossip about," and Colonel Du Bose spoke earnestly.

"And I shall also resent any slur against Lonsdale, for those who will talk behind his back about him, must learn that he has friends who deem his honor as precious as their own," added Major Branscombe; and Captain Ruth said laughingly:

"With two such champions, the gossip about Lonsdale I am sure will end."

"I shall at least let it be known that it will be dangerous to slander him, until his side of the duel with the stranger is heard, and I hope it will check those ugly rumors which go so far as to say Captain Lonsdale drove the girl to suicide."

As Major Branscombe was about to reply, one of his dragoons entered and handed him a letter with the remark:

"This was sent to your quarters, sir, and as it was marked 'important,' I sought you."

"Thank you, Denin," and the young officer broke the seal and read the contents.

Then he looked at his watch, and excusing himself to his friends, he left Military Hall with the air of a man who had an important engagement.

CHAPTER XLVI.

QUESTIONED.

THE letter which Lionel Lonsdale had received was as follows:

"VERNON HALL—8 P. M.

"MY DEAR MAJOR BRANSCOMBE:—May I beg that you come to me on receipt of this, if not after ten o'clock, as I have a most important matter to consult you about, having just received a communication which perhaps you can shed some light upon."

"Very sincerely,

"BELLE VERNON."

It was about nine when the major received this note, and he hastened at once to Vernon Hall.

He saw the fair mistress of the handsome house pacing the piazza, as though awaiting his coming.

"I am so glad to see you," she said, earnestly, as he ascended the steps. "Father has gone to the admiral's to a card-party, and Mrs. Lonsdale has at last dropped into a sleep, under the influence of opiates administered by the doctor, so we will be undisturbed."

He saw that her manner was excited, and, as they entered the sitting-room he observed her face to be flushed and an angry look in her eyes.

"You have been so true a friend to me, Major Branscombe, that I call upon you as I would upon my poor brother, whom father never allows to be spoken of at home since he fled years ago."

"But he was so good to me, and I often wonder where he is wandering and wish that he could come back and prove that he was not guilty of the crime he is charged with."

"But I forget that it was not to speak of my unfortunate brother that I asked you to come, only you have been as kind to me as he could have been."

"Let me take his place, then, as near as I can, Miss Belle, and call upon me as though I were in reality your brother, in all that I can serve you."

"You are very good, Major Branscombe; but let me now tell you why I asked you to come."

"I am all attention."

"I received a letter just after supper, which surprised and pained me."

"A letter?"

"Yes, and from one whom I do not know."

"That is strange."

"Will you tell me the truth, if I ask you some questions?"

"I will."

"I feared you would refuse to tell me."

"I have nothing to conceal."

"You are Captain Lonsdale's confidant."

"No, I can hardly say that, though I deem him my best friend, and believe he so considers me."

"Did he fight a duel this morning?"

Major Branscombe started.

"Will you not answer me?"

"You have heard of that also?"

"I have."

"How?"

"Please answer me."

"He did."

"Where?"

"Upon Cedar Point."

"When?"

"At sunrise."

"Who was his second?"

"Colonel Du Bose."

"Who was the duel with?"

"A Mr. Leslie."

"And who was Mr. Leslie's second?"

"I was."

"Yet the friend of Captain Lonsdale?"

"I acted as Leslie's second at the request of Lonsdale."

"Who else was there?"

"The surgeon of my regiment, the driver of Leslie's carriage, and Brandy, Lonsdale's negro servant."

"Those were all?"

"Yes."

"One question more?"

"Yes, Miss Belle."

"Who is this Mr. Leslie?"

"That I cannot tell you."

"Will not?"

"No, cannot."

"You do not know?"

"I do not."

"Describe him, please."

"A tall man, very distinguished looking, dark-faced, and with a foreign air."

"About how old?"

"About forty to forty-five, I should say."

"Where does he live?"

"I do not know, but I believe upon a plantation near the Penobscot River."

"Did you never see him before?"

"Not before last night at Military Hall."

"Will you pardon me for being so inquisitive, and tell me what occurred?"

"He was there when we went from here, and called Lonsdale aside."

"What passed I do not know, but they came into the room where Colonel Du Bose and myself were seated, and Captain Lonsdale presented his companion as 'Mr. Leslie.'"

"Then he told us that Mr. Leslie had a supposed grievance—"

"Did he say supposed?"

"I think so, or his words and manner implied it, and he asked me to second him, as he had no friend."

"I did so, and the meeting was arranged for this morning."

"Did not Mr. Leslie tell you anything of his trouble?"

"Nothing."

"I called for him at dawn, had a cup of coffee with him, and we went to the field in a carriage."

"He was a very entertaining man, I found him, though of a stern nature, and he told me he meant to kill Lonsdale, as he had never met a man who was his equal with a sword."

"But he was wounded?"

"Yes, for Lonsdale is a phenomenal swordsman."

"Please tell me more?"

Her manner was most entreating as she uttered the words.

Then she added:

"If you are not betraying confidence."

"No, for it is known, I find."

"Lonsdale acted wholly upon the defensive, until Mr. Leslie spoke to him in a low tone, and I caught the words that he meant to kill him."

"Then Lonsdale disarmed him, turning his sword far off."

"And then?"

"The man was mad, rushed for his sword, and though we interposed, Lonsdale told us

to let him come on, and then he drove his blade clean through his sword-arm."

"And then?"

The stranger turned, walked to his carriage without a word, and drove from the field.

"The driver of the carriage, whom I questioned to-night, told me he went to Doctor Norton, had his wound dressed, and then went on board the Portland packet."

"Has it sailed?" eagerly asked Belle.

"Yes, two hours ago."

"I am so sorry."

"Oh! that I had known it sooner," and Belle Vernon's face showed deep emotion.

CHAPTER XLVII.

A STRANGE LETTER.

"MAY I in turn become questioner, Miss Belle, and ask why you wish that you had known that Mr. Leslie was to sail?"

Major Branscombe asked the question, when he saw that Belle Vernon had some deep cause for the feeling she exhibited.

"I will tell you, yes, for it was to ask your advice that I wrote you to come to me."

"Something has disturbed you, without doubt."

"Major Branscombe, between Captain Lonsdale and myself there is no spoken pledge."

"He asked me to trust him through all."

"I have done so."

"He asked this before he sailed with his convict crew, in what was then called the Fatal Frigate."

"Through all I have trusted him, and he has made his enemies, those who are the ardent friends of Captain Frank Fenton admire and respect him."

"He has returned to port, and his noble deeds gained for him the pardon for his felon crew."

"Now he has gone again and under circumstances that almost shake my faith."

She spoke earnestly, and the soldier listened with deepest attention.

Then he asked:

"In what way, Miss Vernon?"

"He left me last night, with you, still holding my pledge to trust him, and yet this morning he fought a duel with a man whose cause of quarrel with him he did not make known."

"Why should he?"

"Was it not but justice to you?"

"No, for Colonel Du Bose was his second."

"Then did he explain to Colonel Du Bose?"

"I am certain that he did not."

"He said that the gentleman had forced him to challenge him, and more, on the field, he remarked that he hoped we would understand that the duel was not of his seeking."

"He said this?"

"He did."

"And no more?"

"He disarmed his adversary, and when attacked a second time refrained from killing him, where other men, I for one, would have shown no mercy."

"Had he no cause?"

"How do you mean?"

"May there not have been a cause for his mercy?"

"His desire not to take human life was all that I could see."

"This evening, Major Branscombe, a man left this letter for me."

She handed him a letter bearing a seal, on which was stamped a pair of crossed cut-throats.

It was written as though with difficulty, or the writing was labored.

"This is from some ignorant person, from the writing, I take it."

"No, Major Branscombe, it is written by a man of education, as you will discover when you read it, but it was written with evident difficulty and pain, the excuse being given at the end of the letter."

"Am I at liberty to read it?"

"Certainly."

He opened the letter and was glancing over the contents, when Belle said:

"Please read it aloud."

"As you wish," was the reply.

Then he read slowly and in a low tone as follows:

"ON BOARD PORTLAND PACKET SPRAY, }
FRIDAY. }

"TO MISS BELLE VERNON, VERNON HALL:—
MADAM:—Pardon one who is a stranger to you for writing as I now do."

"It is for your welfare that I do so, to save you from a sorrow that is sure to come upon you."

"I came to this town some time ago to seek one whose life I wish to take, for that wish still remains in my heart, though I failed in doing so to-day."

"I dwell upon a plantation on a rugged coast far to the eastward of here, and, with a pleasant home and an only child, had as much happiness as comes to the lot of man in general."

"My child was my daughter, a beautiful maiden who had not yet passed out of her nineteenth year."

"I loved her, for she was all I had in this world to love."

"When a girl budding into maidenhood, she was saved from being kidnapped by pirates through the courage of a young naval officer."

"He took her to the boarding-school where she had been receiving her education, and she saw him for only a moment, as it were, as he slipped away before she could thank him."

"But she never forgot his face, and never ceased to pray for him."

"Two years after, off our coast, a schooner was threatened with destruction, and death to her crew."

"My child saw the vessel, and, at the risk of her life, saved it by going out in her boat and bringing it in to a safe anchorage."

"The schooner's commander lay desperately wounded and unconscious in his cabin."

"It was the young officer who had before saved my child."

"She had him brought ashore, and, being a surgeon, I dressed his wound, and we brought him back to life."

"He left us when able to do so, and he carried my child's heart with him."

"He knew that she loved him, for she had shown it in every look and word."

"She believed that he loved her, for he had so pretended."

"In some way she learned that he was to marry a fair maiden of this town, and she went to his home, and was repulsed by his mother and sister."

"They told him of her visit, and he went to her home."

"What was said, Heaven and that man only know."

"But my child is dead."

"She went over the cliff into the sea, and her body was never found."

"He sailed away, leaving me a letter that told me she had sprung from the cliff."

"I believe that he threw her from it."

"I came here to seek him, and I forced him to meet me."

"I believed that I could kill him."

"I was mistaken, for we met in a duel, in which his friend, Major Branscombe, was my second, and Colonel Du Bose his."

"He wounded me, but my revenge will yet come."

"That man, who murdered my child, because she loved him, because she stood in the way of his winning you and your riches, is Captain Lionel Lonsdale, the commander of the Haunted Cruiser."

"Cast him off, unless you wish to marry a woman's murderer."

"Drive him from you unless you wish to become a widow."

"I meant to keep my sorrows a secret; but I could not do so, and so write you all."

"Pardon my wretched writing, as my hand suffers from the cruel wound the murderer of my poor Lola gave me."

"But Lionel Lonsdale's days are numbered."

"He sailed on the Fatal Frigate, and Fate works slowly but surely."

"With regret to give you pain, as I know I must, your obedient servant,"

"ENRIQUE LESLIE."

Such was the strange letter that Bert Branscombe read.

CHAPTER XLVIII.

THE YOUNG SPY.

THE letter which Major Branscombe read, from Enrique Leslie, caused his eyes to darken angrily.

"This is infamous," he said.

"What?"

Belle asked the question in a low tone.

"This letter."

"You do not believe it?"

"Yes, in part."

"What part do you disbelieve?"

"That Lonsdale could be guilty of such an act."

"You think the maiden took her own life?"

"Undoubtedly."

"I could not bring myself to accuse Captain Lonsdale of such an act."

"No, nor was he guilty of deceiving the girl, I am sure, for he is no man to play with a woman's heart."

"I am glad to hear you speak so of him."

"It is but just that I should."

"I am pained that this unfortunate girl's father should have so spoken of him."

"There is devilry beneath that letter, according to my analyzation of it, Miss Vernon."

"The truth was, the girl madly loved Lonsdale, and that I do not blame her for."

"She lived alone with her father, seeing few people, doubtless, and became fascin-

ated with the handsome fellow, for he had served her once, and she had saved his life."

"He was kind to her, without doubt, but that he asked her to become his wife, or even made love to her, and then deceived her, I am sure was not the case."

"Her father's nature was doubtless hers, and she heard rumors that Lonsdale loved you, and at once became mad with jealousy."

"In finding, when he visited her, that he did not love her, as she wished, the frenzied girl, in a moment of ungovernable fury, doubtless sprung from the cliff."

"Such is my theory."

"You are a noble friend, Bert Branscombe, and you cause me to blush that I had a doubt of Captain Lonsdale, for, though as I told you, we are not engaged, I feel that we are near to each other, and it cut me to the heart to read that letter."

"Not that I believed him the girl's destroyer, oh, no! but I feared that he might have led her to believe that he loved her."

"Mr. Leslie, in his letter, says that his daughter went to Sealands, which is the name of Lonsdale's home; so ask his mother what she knows about the girl."

"I will."

"But, as she may not know that she is dead, I would not tell her, as she has grief enough to hear just now."

"It is thoughtful of you to remind me."

"But what about this letter?"

"In what respect?"

"The man's threats."

"A threatened man is long-lived, Miss Vernon."

"Still that man means what he says."

"Doubtless."

"You will warn Captain Lonsdale?"

"The moment I see him."

"But what can he do?"

"Call the fellow out and run him through," was the blunt response.

"I do not think he will do that."

"Better Leslie's life than his; but I will not detain you later, so do not grieve over the letter, for if you have any dread that Leslie will kill Lonsdale, I'll get a leave, run up to find the fellow and kill him myself, just out of friendship for you," and with a laugh he bade her good-night, wending his way back to Military Hall, where he was pained to learn that the unkind rumors against Captain Lonsdale were still gaining ground.

"Du Bose, there is some underhand work about this."

"Some one antagonistic to Lonsdale is nagging this gossip on," said Major Branscombe to his friend, who replied:

"I am sure of that myself."

Two days after the Saturn returned to port, unable to find the pirate schooner or Pretty Ellen, though the shortness of her stay did not indicate a very thorough search.

It was by no means a pleasant surprise for Captain Fenton to learn that his rival had come in under flying colors, during his absence, and gone to sea again in chase of the buccaneer and packet schooner.

Nor did he like the idea of Mrs. Lonsdale being a guest at Vernon Hall.

But he was very much pleased at the gossip that was going the rounds about Lionel Lonsdale, as to his having caused a young and beautiful girl to take her life, and then wounded her father most dangerously when he sought to avenge his daughter.

"Is there any truth in it, Lucien?" he asked the young naval apprentice who gave him the information with great gusto.

"Yes, sir, there is."

"How do you know?"

"Well, sir, I carried the letter that the lady's father wrote to Miss Vernon."

"You did?"

"Yes, sir, for I was down to the Portland packet to see my aunt off, and Mr. Leslie saw me in the cabin, where he was writing, and asked me to see that the letter reached its address, at the same time giving me a gold-piece."

"I had seen Captain Lonsdale leave his vessel at daylight in a boat with Colonel Du Bose and that black devil Brandy, and when I went to Military Hall for the admiral, two hours after, up drove Mr. Leslie, and he was wounded."

"This made me know there had been a duel, and when he sent the letter to Miss Vernon I thought you wanted to know the

contents, so I just read them," and the young rascal told what Enrique Leslie's letter had said.

"You have done well, Lucien; but how about breaking the seal?"

"I saw the seal was stamped with a pair of crossed swords, and I had a sea button with crossed cutlasses on it, so I didn't mind breaking it and sealing it over."

"You are a great rascal, Lucien."

"Yes, sir."

"But you have done well for me, and I expected you would when I took you into my service."

"Thank you, sir."

"Well, here is a couple of gold-pieces for you, and I think I shall have to make you my ship's clerk."

"I've done more, sir."

"Well?"

"I've started the stories about Captain Lonsdale and all that, for I told several old women all about it, and it doesn't take long for them to spread it."

"You are a fine boy, Lucien, and I guess you have ended Captain Lonsdale's affair at Vernon Hall."

"I hope so, sir."

"You shall be well remembered, Lucien, if such is the case."

"Now go, and keep your eyes and ears both open—stay!"

"Yes, sir."

"Did you deliver the letter in person to Miss Vernon?"

"No, sir; I took a mate with me and he gave it to the butler, while I waited in the yard."

"That was right."

"Now I wish you to take a note for me to Miss Vernon, saying I wish to call this evening."

The note was written and sent.

Half an hour after Lucien returned with the verbal answer:

"Miss Vernon says that she will not be at home, sir, as she is leaving town for a short while."

A curse came to the lips of the young captain, and his humor was by no means improved when he saw, an hour after, the commodore's privateer brig sail down the harbor with Belle Vernon standing upon her deck, leaning upon the arm of her father.

They bowed, and he was so mystified and angry that he forgot to raise his hat, and the privateer brig passed on.

CHAPTER XLIX.

AT REST.

THE day following the visit of Major Branscombe to see Belle Vernon, the town was too full of unpleasant rumors and idle gossip about Lionel Lonsdale to be kept long from the ears of the poor mother, and the old nurse, with no intention to do harm had told her just what was said.

The punishment of the nurse, who had been engaged at most lucrative wages, at a time when she was in need of money, come very quickly, for Mrs. Lonsdale said at once:

"I will not remain in a town where my son, after all that he has done, is so illy thought of."

"Ask Miss Vernon to please come here."

The nurse begged her to feel that they were nothing but idle rumors, and, thoroughly alarmed at the mischief her words might cause, tried to retract them.

But Mrs. Lonsdale cut her short with:

"My good woman, I will pay you for your services thus far—here is your money—now please depart, and ask a servant to request Miss Vernon to come to me."

The old nurse felt keenly her just punishment for her gossip, and departed with tears in her eyes.

In a short while Miss Vernon came into the invalid's room, when she was surprised to see her up and dressed.

"My dear Mrs. Lonsdale, I am so glad to see you better."

"I am not better, Miss Vernon, and I feel that I never shall be; but I desire to return home to-day, either by stage or packet."

In vain did Belle plead with her, for Mrs. Lonsdale would have her way.

"But you are not well enough."

"I shall never be any better, and these stories about my brave boy are killing me."

"Then you have heard all from that busy-body old nurse?"

"Yes, all."

"Did you know the unfortunate girl?"

"I met her twice, and she was, in my opinion, crazed."

"She came to Sealands when Eve was at home, and demanded of us if Leo was engaged to you?"

"She refused to enter our house, sailed there alone in her own little boat, and after threatening to kill him rather than lose him, or to take her own life, she departed."

"Eve came here to see her brother and tell him all."

"It was there you saw her, and while she was away that poor, mad creature came again."

"Lionel brought Eve home, as you know, and then sailed for Castle Bleak, her home."

"More I cannot tell you."

"And you will go?"

"Yes, for I feel I cannot live long."

"My heart has long given me trouble, and the capture of Eve, and this trouble, gives me a warning I must not overlook."

"I wish to go back to Sealands, and put my house in order against the coming of death."

She spoke in perfect calmness, and her words brought tears to the eyes of Belle Vernon.

"Mrs. Lonsdale, my father comes home soon to supper and I will ask him about the packets, for you are unable to go by stage," said Belle, and upon her father's coming she told him all.

"These accursed rumors have been dinged in my ears all day, child, and your name with them," said the old commodore.

"But what about Mrs. Lonsdale's going?"

"She must not."

"She will though, sir."

"I'll talk to her."

And the commodore did, but all to no purpose.

Then he said:

"I'll tell you what I'll do, madam."

"I wish to take a sail in my brig, the same that brought you here, for I have never done so, and Belle needs a change, so we'll take you home and sail to-morrow night, and—but here comes that fine fellow Branscombe, and we'll talk it over with him, for he is your friend, madam, our friend, and your son's, and he has a very level head."

Major Branscombe heard the story, and made a suggestion to the effect that he should quietly obtain leave and accompany them, and he added:

"I have a desire to visit Castle Bleak, and find out about this man Leslie."

So it was arranged, and thus it was that Belle Vernon sent word to Captain Frank Fenton that she would not be at home, and he afterward saw her upon the deck of the privateer brig.

As for Major Branscombe, he had not told any one he was going away, obtaining leave simply to "absent himself from duty for a short time," and he remained in the cabin of the brig until the vessel had passed the forts.

Mrs. Lonsdale had borne up bravely, until in the cabin of the brig, and then she seemed to feel very weak and wretched.

But Belle had brought her own old nurse along, a woman who had cared for her in childhood, and the invalid was to be taken the best care of, while the commodore had sent aboard a quantity of provisions and wines, and his cook and butler to see that they should not be spoiled in the cooking and serving.

"We'll not starve, Branscombe, or go thirsty," he said, as the two sat on deck that night enjoying the lovely sail.

The brig made a good run, and arriving in the bay, a signal gun was fired, and the boatman at Sealands came off and acted as pilot into the cove.

The house was at once thrown open for its mistress and her guests, and the well-trained servants went about their work in a way to make all comfortable and to feel at home.

But Mrs. Lonsdale was forced to go to her room, and she whispered to Belle:

"My child, the end is not far away, so you must not leave me."

"I will not, my dear Mrs. Lonsdale."

"Your father said he was in no hurry to return, so stay until I am at rest."

"I will."

Ten days passed away, and the grief-burdened woman was at rest.

CHAPTER L.

A VISIT TO CASTLE BLEAK.

THE day after the arrival of the Belle of Blue Water at Sealands, Major Branscombe decided to go on a voyage to Castle Bleak.

The commodore had told him of Mrs. Lonsdale's words to Belle, and also that he did not believe the poor lady could last over a few weeks.

"You can take the brig and run up the coast and see what you can find out about that strange man and the girl's death, and I tell you frankly, Branscombe, I am most anxious to know, for that little girl of mine loves Lonsdale, and if there is aught wrong I must know it."

"I understand you, commodore, and I will do all I can to find out everything."

"I will stay here, for it would not be right for me to leave, and I assure you, but for that poor dying woman I could enjoy it immensely, for the cook is an excellent one, and the wines of Sealands are simply delicious, while my room is as comfortable as I have at home, and that is saying much."

"Then I can sail on the bay, fish, shoot and enjoy my rest from business cares."

"But return within two weeks, and if you can bring a French merchantman back as a prize so much the better."

"I'll try to, commodore," answered the young soldier, and he went in to say good-bye to Mrs. Lonsdale and to tell her he hoped he would be able to bring her word that no shadow of blame rested upon her son for the death of the unfortunate Lola.

"I fear I shall never see her alive again," he said to Belle, as with her father they went down to the little cove to see the major off.

With a good-bye he sprung into the boat, and soon after the Belle of Blue Water was flying away from Sealands, her merchant skipper and crew anxious to meet a French prize, and to fight an enemy's vessel-of-war if not too strong for them.

Having obtained an idea of the locality of Castle Bleak, Major Branscombe held a consultation with Henry Raymond, the genial skipper of the Belle of Blue Water, and the result was that the brig hugged the coast very close and a sharp lookout was kept for a fisherman, or some small coasting craft.

The day after leaving Sealands a man was seen in a small boat, engaged in fishing and he was hailed and told to come on board.

His jump and look of surprise showed that he had gone to sleep while fishing, and had not seen the approach of the brig.

He seemed as though he meant to try and escape to an island half a mile away, when Major Branscombe, who had a voice of great power, shouted:

"Come alongside, sir, or I'll pour a broadside upon you."

The man hastily rowed toward the brig, to the amusement of the crew, for he showed that he was frightened.

He was a man with a dogged expression of countenance, coarsely attired, and appeared to be either a fisherman or coast seaman.

"Well, my man, you acted wisely to come and not attempt to run off, for we mean you no harm," said the major.

"I thought you were a Frenchman," the man replied.

"No, this is a king's craft; but can you tell me where dwells upon this coast Mr. Enrique Leslie?"

The man hesitated, and then he replied:

"No, sir!"

"Why did you hesitate?"

"I was thinking, sir."

"Then think again."

"I don't know, sir."

"Well, take this for your trouble, and see if you can remember where Castle Bleak is?"

As he spoke the major tossed a gold-piece into the boat.

"It's three leagues from here, sir."

"Then you do know?"

"I know Castle Bleak, or where it is, though I've never been there."

"Does not Mr. Leslie live there?"

"Don't know, sir."

"Are you a coaster?"

"I was, when times was good."

"What do you do now?"

"Fish a little, and work a little on the farms when I can."

"You know this coast well, I suppose?"

"Yes, sir."

"Then come on board, for I wish you to pilot us into the nearest harbor to Castle Bleak."

The man hesitated.

"Five pounds if you do as I ask you, and freedom."

"Impressment in the king's service if you refuse."

"Which shall it be?"

"I'll pilot you, sir, and take the gold."

"Come aboard, then."

"Will you take my boat aboard, sir, for I don't wish to be seen as pilot, sir?"

"We are not a French ship."

"No, sir; but people along this shore are curious, and they might say you was French."

"These are ticklish times, sir."

"All right."

The man came on board, his boat was hauled in and hidden on deck, and then he asked for a sailor's suit so that he would not be recognized if seen from the shore with a glass.

"There's folks' lives further up, sir," he said.

"And no one here?"

"No, sir."

"What were you doing so far away, then?"

"Fishing, sir."

"I believe you are one of the smugglers belonging to the band known as Casco Corsairs, and were on watch there for some vessel."

The man turned pale and the major saw that he had hit pretty near the truth.

"Oh, no sir! I'm an honest man!"

"Very well, act squarely with me and you get your gold I promised, and I'll let you go. But let me catch you at any tricks and you'll make the acquaintance of the yard-arm."

"Now get into that suit of clothes and take the wheel."

The man obeyed, and two hours after the brig ran into a cove on the lee of an island half a league from Castle Bleak.

Lowering a boat the major sprung into it and the four oarsmen pulled for the little cove which the pilot, who remained on board, directed the young soldier how to enter.

CHAPTER LI.

GAINING INFORMATION.

WHEN the boat drew near the entrance to the little cove, near Castle Bleak, Major Branscombe most attentively examined the surroundings.

He had questioned the pilot closely, and learned from him, in spite of his assertion awhile before, and which he had seemed to have forgotten, that he did not know Mr. Leslie, that the gentleman lived at Castle Bleak with his servants, since the death of his daughter.

He furthermore had said that Miss Leslie, or Lady Lola, as he spoke of her, had fallen from the cliff and been drowned.

The man had pointed out the cliff, and Castle Bleak indistinctly seen in the background through the pine trees.

Rowing around under the cliff the major saw that it was a straight wall, from the top to the water, a distance of perhaps seventy feet.

Going into the cove he saw several boats at anchor there, one a high-bowed, high-sterned little pleasure craft such as Mrs. Lonsdale had described the one in which Lola Leslie had visited Sealands.

Landing at the stout wharf of logs, the officer told the men to amuse themselves about on the shore, and ascending the winding path he soon reached the summit of the cliff.

There, beneath a tree that grew alone he beheld a huge rock, that served as a monument, for upon it was cut deeply in the following:

"TO THE MEMORY

OF

MY LOST IDOL

LOLA LESLIE."

For some time the soldier stood by the rock, lost in deep thought, and then, stepping to the edge of the cliff he looked down

into the rough depths below, for the waters beat savagely against the wall of rock.

Back beyond the pine grove he saw Castle Bleak, and upon it rested an air of desolation well worthy the name its eccentric master had given it.

Following the path he approached the mansion, wondering at its solitary grandeur in that far-away spot.

"Only an exile should live here," he muttered, strangely enough hitting the truth of the building of the mansion by its former master, an exile.

Ascending the stone steps he let the huge brass knocker fall several times.

Soon the door opened, and to his surprise a servant in livery appeared.

"Is this Castle Bleak?"

"Yes, my lord," responded the servant, seemingly surprised at the appearance of the soldier, who was attired in his full regimentals, for in those days soldiers wore their uniforms at all times.

"I would see Mr. Leslie, please."

"My master is not at home, sir."

"I am sorry, but I hope he will not be long away, for I had the pleasure of meeting him in Boston awhile since, and cruising near concluded to visit him."

"You are a friend of the master, then?"

The soldier hardly knew what to say, and yet he wished to know something of the man who dwelt here, and he said:

"Oh, yes, and I wish to know how his wound is?"

"Ah, sir, you know it then?"

"That he was wounded?"

"Yes, sir."

"Oh, yes."

"Would you say, sir, how it happened?"

"Did your master not tell you?"

"No, sir, and we servants fear he was set upon in the city by foes."

"No, he received his wound in an honorable manner; but is he recovering?"

"Yes, sir, though it has been a bad wound, and still gives him pain."

"When will he return, did you say?"

"Within the hour, sir, for he rode to the village, and has been gone some time."

"It is the first time he has gone so far since he was wounded."

"I suppose his daughter's death saddens him?"

"Ah, yes, sir, it was a fearful blow to us all, so young, so beautiful, so kind was Miss Lola."

"Was she very beautiful?"

"Very, sir," and putting his finger to his lips he walked back into the house.

Then he returned and said:

"I will show you her portrait, sir, which master had painted by a fine artist in the city."

"He has draped it in crape and will not look at it, sir; but I will show you if she was not beautiful, only do not let master know."

Branscombe promised secrecy, and then Enos led him into the magnificently furnished house and drew aside the somber drapery from a large portrait in a massive frame.

It was life size, and weirdly beautiful was the dark, gypsy-like face, and gorgeous indeed the attire.

"That is Miss Lola, sir," the man said in a whisper.

For a long time the young soldier gazed upon it, and then he mused:

"Just the face of a woman to kill or die for love."

"A strangely beautiful, dangerous face."

"Come, sir, I dare not let you remain longer."

"See, how master has draped the whole house in black."

As he spoke Enos pointed to the massive drapings of rich black velvet and crape that hung about the walls.

"Your master must be very rich to expend so much money in costly draperies for his dead child."

"I do not know, sir."

"And how did the poor young lady die?"

"Alas, sir, she fell from the cliff into the sea, and it has never given up its dead."

"Was she alone?"

"Well, sir, no."

"Her father was with her, then?"

"No, sir, but one who had been a guest at Castle Bleak, a naval officer, sir."

"Ah, yes, I now recall, it was my friend, Captain Lonsdale."

"You know him then, sir?"

"Intimately."

"He is a noble gentleman, sir, and it hurt him to see Miss Lola die before his eyes."

"It must have; but pray, tell me how it was?"

"Well, sir, Miss Lola saw his vessel coming in, and waited for him, for you must know, sir, she loved him."

"They were walking, or standing on the cliff, when she started suddenly and went over."

"A fisherman who was off near one of the islands says that she ran and sprung off herself, for he was looking toward her at the time."

"But he was mistaken, of course."

"Then they were to be married, Captain Lonsdale and Miss Lola?"

"That, sir, I do not know; but the captain, to my thinking, did not love her as she did him."

"Did this fisherman tell your master that he saw Miss Lola spring from the cliff?"

"Well, sir, he dared not, for master has been very grim since."

"What did you say the fisherman's name was?"

"Tony Brent, sir."

"Where do the fishermen on this coast live, for there seems to be no market near for their fish?"

"There are but few, sir, scattered along, and Tony lives on an island leagues south; but, sir, would you mind walking about near the cliff, sir, until master returns, for I am not allowed to let any one enter the mansion in his absence?"

"Certainly, my man, and I thank you for your information."

"Take this as a keepsake," and a guinea was slipped into the open palm of the servant who bowed low and then closed the heavy door in the face of the visitor, who sauntered back toward the cliff, a smile upon his face as he muttered:

"So far good; now for Mr. Tony Brent, the fisherman."

CHAPTER LII.

THE INSULT.

MAJOR BRANSCOMBE had not waited long upon the cliff before he saw Enos approaching.

"My master has returned, sir."

"Well?"

"I told him your name, and he bade me ask you up to the house, while he was changing his riding-suit."

Enos led the way, and upon reaching the mansion, the visitor was ushered into the grand parlor, which he had not seen before, as he had been shown the sitting-room where the portrait hung.

All about the large parlor was hung the rich and somber drapery of mourning but the dragoon observed that from the carpet to the window curtains there was an air of wealth and refinement stamped upon everything.

A harp stood in one corner, and over it was thrown a mass of velvet, tastefully draped.

Soon a quick, firm step was heard in the hall, and Mr. Enrique Leslie entered.

He was pale, and showed the effects of suffering.

His right arm was worn in a sling, but he was dressed in a costume that was very rich, though in black, while he wore his jewels, in spite of being in mourning.

"Major Branscombe, I greet you, sir, though I had no idea of ever seeing you at Castle Bleak."

"To what circumstance, sir, am I indebted for the honor of your visit?"

The manner was courtly, the welcome cold, and Bert Branscombe saw that it would have been preferred by his host had he stayed away.

"I was called to the coast further down, Mr. Leslie, to aid in bringing Mrs. Lonsdale to her home, for she is dying."

"Indeed?"

"Yes, sir."

"Would that it were her son, and that my hand had caused his death."

"You see I still suffer from the wound he

gave me," and a grim smile crossed the speaker's face.

"I see, sir, and you were fortunate that he had the mercy not to take your life."

"You were telling me why you came, sir, when I caused you to digress—but, oh! let me ask you into my dining-room for a glass of wine."

Bert Branscombe could not well refuse, and besides, he was determined to know all that he could about this strange man.

So he bowed and followed him.

The mourning draperies, the solid silver-service, the rare wine, the liveried, stately servant, made it rather impressive and oppressive to the dragoon, to eat and drink with Enrique Leslie; but he bore it well, and was surprised that while offering his hospitality, Mr. Leslie became most entertaining.

Half an hour thus passed and the host led the way back into the parlors, and instantly his manner became cold and cynical once more.

"You were telling me, Major Branscombe, when we left this room, why I have the honor of your presence at Castle Bleak?"

"In a word, sir, I came to ask you, as man to man, if your daughter did not, in her frenzy from unrequited love, take her own life, and was not driven to it by any word or act of Lionel Lonsdale?"

"That is a matter, sir, with which Captain Lonsdale and myself alone have to do."

"You are mistaken, sir, for it is a matter that interests others, myself among the number."

"I repeat, that it concerns now but Captain Lonsdale and myself."

"I will prove to the contrary, sir, by your having written an anonymous letter to Admiral Fenton, telling him of the duel, and also a letter to Miss Belle Vernon, making charges against Lonsdale to influence her against him."

"Here, sir, is where you brought two others into the matter, and I step in as the friend of Miss Vernon, and also of Mrs. Lonsdale, who is dying, as I told you, and has as a nightmare before her, the charge that you make against her son, that *Lionel Lonsdale is your daughter's murderer!*"

"I declare him so to be."

"Upon the basis of a father's love for a lost child only, and from no proofs."

"Need I greater proof than that she is dead?"

"Yes."

"What proof?"

"The word of those who saw and heard all."

This was a random shot of the dragoon's; but he saw that it hit hard, for the man fairly gasped:

"Who heard and saw all?"

"That, sir, I will not now make known."

"Major Branscombe, I shall allow no interference in this matter, sir."

"I shall act, sir, without your authority, for my friend shall not rest under the charge you make against him."

"My charge, sir, is that he murdered my child, and when I meet him again he shall face me in mortal combat."

"You may not find him as merciful at another time."

"He will find me merciless," was the savage response.

"Then I am to understand, sir, that you refuse even to ease the last moments of a dying mother, to withdraw your charge?"

"I do."

"When I tell you to that the happiness of a lady is at stake, the one to whom you addressed your cruel letter?"

"I refuse, sir."

"Then, Mr. Leslie, where you urge war against women, and one on her deathbed, you are a coward."

The words came out with startling distinctness.

The strange man started, but said with his cynical smile:

"You see, sir, that my sword-arm is wounded—you saw the tarust given me."

"Yes, but it will be well before very long, Mr. Leslie, and you know my name and where to find me, while, if you do not feel like taking a voyage to Boston, send your friend to me, and I will gladly meet you wherever you may designate."

"Good-afternoon, Mr. Leslie."

With this Major Bert Branscombe bowed

himself out, and an hour after he was again on the brig, which was headed back toward Sealands, the coast pilot still at the wheel.

CHAPTER LIII.

THE CAPTURE.

"My man, you did not tell me the name you bear?" said Major Branscombe, after the Belle of Blue Water was under way, and he addressed the coast pilot:

"Tony Brent, sir."

The major gave a whistle.

It meant a great deal, for Tony Brent was the man that he wished to see.

"Well, Mr. Brent, I am glad to have met you, and I hope we shall meet again."

"Now here is the money I promised you, and, if you wish, when we reach the vicinity of the island near which we found you, you are free to go, if you wish."

The man took the money gladly, and then Major Branscombe said:

"I was talking to poor Mr. Leslie about his daughter, who went mad, you know."

"I think she was mad, sir, but I don't dare say so to Mr. Leslie."

"I see, for he seems nearly crazed with grief of her."

"But I really think she sprung from that cliff herself."

"I know she did, sir, for I saw her do it."

"Indeed?"

"But, sir, don't tell what I say, for Mr. Leslie would kill me."

"He doesn't know I saw it, but I did."

"What did you see?"

"You won't tell, sir?"

"No, you can trust me."

"Well, sir, I was fishing close in under Star Island, and I saw a boat go ashore."

"An officer left it, that I now know was Captain Lonsdale, and he met Lady Lola upon the cliff."

"They talked together some time, and she seemed very much excited, for I turned my glass upon them."

"Then she raised a knife, as though to strike him in the breast; but he never moved, and flinging the blade away she sprung toward the cliff."

"He was after her very quick, but could not catch her and barely escaped going over himself."

"He then ran round to his boat and made search for her, and signaled to his vessel to send all the boats ashore."

"But it was no use, for she was lost."

"My man, Captain Lonsdale's mother lies dying at Sealands, her home."

"The report is that her son killed Miss Lola Leslie, and I would have the old lady know to the contrary from your lips."

"I will give you one hundred pounds if you will go there with me and tell your story."

"I dare not," said the man, in a frightened way.

"Now, Mr. Tony Brent, you know that I have the power to take you; but I am a man of my word, and I shall set you free."

"But I will give you two hundred pounds to go, and you can say what you please, as to your absence."

The man was silent a moment, and then said: "You are good to me, sir, and I feel sorry for the poor dying lady."

"I will go, sir, though it may cost me my life."

"Here is your money, my man, and if you decide to remain with me, or become a sailor under Captain Lonsdale, I will promise you a good berth."

The man seemed happy at having made so much money, and keeping the wheel he ran the brig the nearest way back to Sealands.

It did not take Major Branscombe to look trim in the face of the commodore, as he went up to the mansion, to see that the end had come.

"She is dead!" said the commodore.

"I feared it!"

"She died soon after you left and we will bury her this morning, after which I shall close the house, leaving the servants in charge, and return home."

"It will be best."

Just then Belle came out upon the piazza, and her sad face lit up with a smile as she greeted the young dragoon.

"I hoped to arrive in time for this man to tell Mrs. Lonsdale that her son was wholly

guiltless of all wrong where Lola Leslie was concerned.

"I saw her father, and he is revengeful, so I could do nothing with him; but this man saw the scene on the cliff and will tell you just what occurred."

The coast pilot at once told his story, and both the commodore and Belle were delighted to know the truth and feel that, whatever motive the girl might have had for her distressful act, Lionel Lonsdale was certainly not guilty of the cruel charge of Mr. Leslie against him.

This being settled, the arrangements for the burial of Mrs. Lonsdale were at once begun, and the people of the estate were called to the funeral.

A minister from the neighboring village had been sent for, and the dead woman was taken to her grave, followed by those who had been her guests, and her servants.

The handsome home was then closed up and left in charge of the faithful servants of the estate, after which the commodore, his daughter and the major went on board the brig and sail was set.

Toward night a fog swept in from the sea, and under shortened sail the brig held on her way, the wind being light.

But suddenly in the middle of the night, came the startling cry:

"Sail, ho!"

There was no need to ask where the vessel was, as she was almost upon them in the fog, neither craft having sighted each other until the same moment.

"Ready, about!" shouted the brig's captain.

But then came the stern order in French:

"Come to, or I'll blow you out of the water."

Major Branscombe was on deck, and he understood French, and a glance showed him that the vessel was a large ship-of-war.

To attempt to fly would be useless.

To attempt to fight would be madness.

So he sprung to the wheel himself and brought the vessel up into the wind, while he said quickly to the astonished skipper:

"Do you not see that yonder vessel is a large sloop-of-war and her broadside would knock you to pieces?"

"You are right, sir, and we can stand no risks with Miss Belle on board."

"We must surrender, and as you understand the lingo please do the talking."

The major then hailed the sloop, saying that they had lowered their colors, and a boat was sent on board and at once took possession.

Learning that there was a lady on board the gallant French commander lay to, until morning, and then the commodore, his daughter and the major were taken on board the sloop-of-war to be held as prisoners until it was decided what should be done with them.

A prize crew was then put on board the privateer brig, and the two vessels headed southward, the French captain heading for the Gulf, and his prisoners felt that it would be many a long day ere they again saw Boston.

CHAPTER LIV.

JEALOUSY.

THE scene changes to the Pirate Isle, among the Bahamas, where dwell Marcelite the Buccaneer's bride, and those who are there as her subjects, for she rules them as a queen might.

It has been long since her husband sailed away, and she has been anything but happy.

Never contented, though remaining there because she loved him, she yet had remained without a murmur.

Now, a grief of another kind came up before her.

Her husband had said he would bring there two fair captives.

Marcelite was of a jealous nature, and something told her that all would not be well.

But she must wait until his return and then she would see if those captives were brought there wholly for ransom.

If she felt that her husband was tiring of her, then she would act, and he should feel the danger of a woman scorned.

One day as she sat watching from her

cabin window, the lookout reported a sail in sight.

She at once repaired to the Lookout Rock with her glass, and discovered two sails in view.

A hasty glance told her that one was the well-known schooner Spitfire.

She other she did not know.

She saw at least that her pirate husband had redeemed his word and retaken his vessel.

As they drew nearer, she observed that the strange vessel was armed, and that the schooner Spitfire was not, while, as they sailed evenly along together, the old vessel was under more sail than the new.

The tide was running in well, so that by the time they reached the island they would be able to cross the bar.

Watching them until they entered the island channel, the pirate's wife then descended from her perch and went to her cabin.

As the chief had ordered, a cabin had been prepared for the prisoners, and all was made as comfortable as possible by Marcelite, for she felt that the blame of coming lay with her husband, not with the unfortunate captives.

When the Pretty Pirate glided alongside of the rocky shelf, the chief looked in vain for his wife among the island group that gathered there.

Entering the cabin, he soon returned accompanied by the captives, and they followed him in silence ashore, and then up the steep hillside to the cabin which had been prepared for them.

The pirate was rather glad that his wife was not there, for he had told his captives that he would place them in charge of his sister, and Eve had remarked:

"Her sisterly love must be strong indeed, that she clings to you in all your villainess."

"Our cabin is at most comfortable," she said, as they reached their little prison, and she gazed about her at the many little evidences of comfort, which Marcelite had placed in their quarters.

"Here are clothes in abundance, too, and of the richest kind," cried Lurline, when the pirate had left them alone.

"This is the work of the one he calls his sister; but whatever she be to him, I pity her," said Eve.

Then they made themselves at home, and wondered what would be the next move of their wicked captor.

In the mean time the pirate had gone to his own cabin, and his wife had greeted him with her usual affection.

"You did not come down to meet me, Marcelite?"

"No."

"Why not?"

"I do not approve of your new idea of bringing female captives here."

"I have done so before."

"Yes, when taken at sea, and it could not be helped, perhaps."

"But now you have deliberately gone to work to capture or kidnap these ladies."

"I will get enormous ransoms for them."

"You have enough wealth as it is."

"I have lost, as you know, in losing my schooner, and need more."

"You have recaptured your schooner?"

"Yes, but not the booty on board."

"And how long will those captives be here?"

"Until I can arrange their ransom only."

"How long will that take?"

"A month, or more."

"And then you will let them go?"

"Yes."

"Both of them?"

"Why do you doubt me, Marcelite?"

"I do not know, Murel, but in this case I do."

"Are you not my wife?"

"Many a wife has been deserted, and will be."

"Ah, Marcelite, you must not be jealous; I suppose you will be more so when I tell you that I told those maidens you were my sister."

"Your sister?"

"Yes."

"And why?"

"I feared they would not believe you were really my wife, and, feeling that you were my sister they would be treated with every respect."

"You will not let them believe otherwise?"

"It is the duty of those in your buccaneer band to obey, and I suppose I must do likewise."

"You are a dear, good girl, Marcelite."

The woman made no reply, and the pirate watched her closely.

But her face showed no anger now.

Suddenly she asked:

"How did you capture these maidens?"

"From their homes."

"When?"

"Some weeks ago, for we have been long on the way, as we were chased off our course by a French cruiser, and then blown far off by a storm of several days."

"Are you not expecting pursuit?"

"How will they know how to find me?"

"Have you forgotten that when you were here before you told me that Lieutenant Harold, Surgeon English and your crew were taken on board the Haunted Cruiser?"

"Can they not follow you here?"

With a livid face and a cry of alarm the one-armed pirate sprung to his feet, crying anxiously:

"I had forgotten that!"

CHAPTER LV.

AN UNEXPECTED FRIEND.

THAT he should have so far overlooked the fact, that he could be tracked to his lair by the young lieutenant who had cut off his hand, or, in fact, the surgeon and several of his crew who were navigators, and all on board the Haunted Cruiser, was a stunning blow to Captain Cutlass.

He saw that Marcelite had remembered what he had forgotten, with all his cunning.

"There is but one thing to do, Marcelite," he said.

"Well?"

"For me to go in my vessel at once to find another retreat."

"Yes, that seems all you can do," answered the woman, quietly, while she added:

"There is no time to lose, either."

"The truth is, Marcelite, the Haunted Cruiser, as I understand it, is outlawed, or at least Captain Lonsdale does not dare enter port, for he carried to sea with him a crew of convicts."

"He is anxious to win pardon for them before he goes into port, and as he has my traitor officers and men with him, I have nothing to fear right off, as from a vessel that was in port and could follow me."

"True, the Haunted Cruiser might be; and will be looked up, and the story of Miss Lonsdale's capture, and Miss Vernon's, be told to Lonsdale, when he will follow me here."

"But I do not fear he will come at once."

"Still it would be better not to trust him."

"True, and I will sail to-night, at high-tide, and look up another retreat, and within a few days I hope to find one."

This being the decision of the chief, he sought the cabin occupied by the captives.

"Young ladies, I wish to say to you that I am going away for a short while, and my sister will care for you."

"I suppose you will communicate with my brother, sir, and let us know the result?" said Eve.

"All in good time, yes; but not now, as my duty is to find a retreat where your brother cannot surprise me."

"I have the honor to say good-by, ladies," and the pirate raised his hat politely and departed.

That night his vessel sailed, the captives watching its departure with considerable delight.

The next morning the mulatress brought them a very tempting breakfast, and soon after Marcelite called at the cabin.

Her sad face and air of refinement impressed them, and when she spoke to them Eve answered in a very friendly manner, for there was something about the woman that won her respect.

In an embarrassed manner, after asking if she could better their cabin in any way, or add to their comfort, Marcelite said:

"May I ask you a few direct questions, Senorita Lonsdale?"

"Certainly, madam."

"When did you first meet my—my brother?" and she emphasized the word brother.

"On board a packet schooner in which I had taken passage from Boston to my home."

"And then?"

"What is your meaning?"

"You became his captive?"

"He captured the schooner, but, when he sought to claim me as a prize, as well as the vessel, his lieutenant interfered, a duel with cutlass followed, and your brother lost his hand."

"I am surprised at this, for my brother is considered the best of swordsmen, and won the title of Captain Cutlass from the manner of wielding that weapon."

"Lieutenant Harold wielded it better on that occasion," was Eve's cool reply.

"And then?"

"My brother's ship came down upon the two schooners, and Captain Cutlass was captured and sent to Boston, from whence he escaped."

"And when did you see him again?"

"When he, through one of his men, inveigled me on board a schooner he had captured by forging my brother's name to a letter he had written to me."

"And then?"

"I found on board Miss Vernon here, a captive, and was told we were to be taken to this island."

"Your brother has hinted that Miss Vernon should be ransomed, while I was intended for the honor of becoming *his bride*," and the face of Eve writhed with scorn.

"His bride?" gasped Marcelite.

"So he hinted, madam."

"But I—"

"I feel that you will not permit such a crime on his part."

"Do you love him?" and the words were uttered in a hoarse whisper.

"Love him? *I hate, I abhor, I loathe him!*"

There was no doubting that Eve Lonsdale meant all that she said.

The eyes of Marcelite were cast down now, and she stood for a moment in deep thought.

Then she asked:

"What are the feelings of Miss Vernon toward Captain Cutlass?"

"The same. How could an honorable woman feel otherwise toward such a being?" was Lurline's quick response.

"I will befriend you," said Marcelite, to whom the words of the two maidens seemed to give great pleasure.

"But how can you?"

"Trust to me and all will come well, for you shall be set free."

"I vow it, and I am your friend."

So saying the strange woman walked away, leaving joy in the breasts of the two captives.

CHAPTER LVI.

THE ESCAPE.

"BELLE," said Eve Lonsdale to her fellow captive, for she now constantly called her by that name, "do you know why that sad-faced, beautiful woman is our friend?"

"No, Eve."

"Jealousy."

"What can she be jealous of?"

"She is not that man's sister."

"He said so."

"Yes."

"And she spoke of him as her brother."

"True, but I have had my doubts all along, and she hesitated when she said the word *brother* each time."

"Then, when I told her he hinted at making me his bride, her face became livid."

"I noticed that."

"Then it flushed up, and she looked as fierce as he does at times, and I am sure the woman is not his sister."

"You think she is his wife?"

"It may be; but she is as anxious to get rid of us as we are to go."

"I hope so."

"I am sure of it, and there will have to be no ransom paid for our return."

"Mark my words."

And Lurline did mark them, for the next day Marcelite paid them a visit and asked:

"Are you afraid to take a big risk to leave this island, senorita?"

"What kind of a risk?"

"You will have to go in a small three-ton smack."

"I will risk it, will you not, Belle?"

"Yes, indeed, I'd go on a plank," answered Lurline.

"I will send a man with you who knows these waters well, there is a cabin in the boat, and I will see that you have ample food and all the comforts I can give you."

"But where would you wish to go?"

"To Charleston, as the nearest port, for there we could get a vessel home."

"Then you shall go there, for the little vessel can creep along the coast, once you have left the Bahamas."

"You are very kind; but will you allow us to be armed?"

"Certainly, if you wish it."

"I do, for we do not care to be at the mercy of any one whom you might send with us."

"They might hunt up their pirate master and return us to him."

"True, but there will be but one man to go, and yet it will be better that you both are armed, and I shall see to it that you are and that he knows nothing of it."

"Thank you, madam; but when are we to go?"

"To-morrow night, for as we have had bad weather of late, I think it will be clear now for a few days."

"I will arrange all, and at midnight to-morrow you can go out when the tide begins to run seaward."

"So be ready, but keep no light burning in your cabin."

"I will come for you."

The woman then turned away, muttering to herself:

"I will thwart him, and yet he shall not know that it is my act."

Going down the path leading to the basin, she approached a small cabin near the shore.

It was the home of the pirate who was called by courtesy the "Harbor Master."

A man of forty sat on a bench at the door, and he arose as she approached, doffing his tarpaulin politely.

"Franklin, I wish a talk with you."

"Yes, lady."

"How long have you been a sailor?"

"Boy and man, forty years, lady."

"You were once in the British Navy, I believe?"

"Yes, lady."

"Why did you turn pirate?"

"It was in this way, lady:

"I was full of grog, for one day my folks came over in a ship from England, to settle in America, and I got a little upset with joy, for there was my old mother, my wife and little one."

"I had put them in a pleasant home my prize money had bought for them, and went on board, as I tell you, a little the worse for the grog in me."

"A young officer I staggered against had me triced up to the grating and the cat-o'-nine tails laid on my bare back."

"It made the blood run, lady, and I was crazed with pain and fury, so when I got free I drew my knife and sprung upon him."

"It touched his heart, and he was dead."

"But, all half-stripped as I was, I jumped into the sea and swam down the harbor."

"It was night, and a gale was blowing, so I got away and swam to a craft that was laying to, in the outer harbor."

"It proved to be smuggler, and I was glad enough to get refuge on board."

"From smuggling I took to piracy."

"Now you know all my life, lady."

"How long ago was this?"

"Five years, lady."

"Would you not like to see your wife, child and mother again?"

"Ah, lady!"

"Would you?"

"I cannot."

"You can."

"Do not hold out false hopes, lady."

"Franklin."

"Yes, lady."

"Could you manage yonder smack alone?"

"Yes, lady."

"Well, put her in perfect trim for sea, and fit her cabin up the best, for I intend that you shall take two lady passengers away from this retreat."

"Get out of the store-house what is needed for bedding and stores for a cruise of a month, and be all ready by to-morrow night."

"You will take the passengers to Charles-

ton, running no risks of capture on the way, and you can sell your boat and go home, for there is to be war soon, and you can join the Americans against the British."

"Here are a few jewels which will bring you a handsome sum, so that you can keep your family from want."

"Oh, lady!"

It was all the man could say, and Marcelite quickly turned away.

But the next night she went to the cabin of the captives, and while all others on the island were buried in sleep, she led them down to the shore of the basin, Franklin carrying Eve's chest.

Then she bade them farewell, and the little craft drifted out of the pirate harbor on its way to freedom.

CHAPTER LVII.

WITHOUT RANSOM.

WHEN the Havenless Cruiser had pointed her prow southward, her daring young commander had her crowded with all the canvas that would draw.

Her destination was the Bahamas, and no prize met there could have swerved her from her course, no matter how valuable.

The crew were in good humor, in the enjoyment of their pardon, and it was a cause of congratulation all round that the Ill Omen had at last conquered her way to find a port open to her and she was no longer a Havenless Cruiser.

Knowing that their captain's sister was a prisoner in the hands of the cruel Cuban Corsair, the men were most anxious for her release, and they went to their work with a will.

The pilot was Lieutenant Harold, who had told Captain Lonsdale he would take the frigate to the vicinity of the island retreat by night, and then two boats could enter under cover of the darkness and capture the island, carrying it by storm.

"If the schooners are there when we arrive, all told there will hardly be over a hundred men on the island, so double that number will be sufficient to make the attack with," Lieutenant Harold had said.

It was two hours after nightfall when the frigate dropped anchor two leagues away from the island, so that she could not be seen by the lookout.

The boats were all ready, the oars had been muffled and the crews were soon in them.

There were seven boats and two hundred men.

In the gig went Lieutenant Harold, with Lionel Lonsdale, and they were to lead the way.

"I fear the tide will turn before we get there, sir, but it will only be a pull of a mile, for we will get pretty close up before it begins to run out," said Harold.

Then he suggested that one boat should land twenty-five marines on one side of the island channel, and another with as many more on the other side.

These were to march inland and attack on land while the boats entered the harbor and boarded the vessels there.

"Sail, ho!"

The words came in a low tone from Harold, who was looking ahead very closely, and spied a sail.

They were not half a mile now from the island channel, and the craft sighted had evidently just come out of it.

Those on board had evidently not seen the boats, and word was passed astern to stretch out in a semicircle and let the vessel sail into their midst.

"She cannot with this light wind get back into the island, nor can she run either side of it, for reefs are thick there," explained Harold.

In a short while more, the movements of the little vessel showed that her skipper had sighted the boat ahead.

But it was too late to run, for he saw that he was surrounded.

"Lay to!" sternly ordered Harold, for his boat was within a cable's length of the craft.

The order was promptly obeyed, and the gig a moment after ran alongside, and Lionel Lonsdale sprang on board.

"Leo! oh, Leo! we are saved!" cried Eve, and she threw her arms about her brother's neck.

It was a joyous meeting, and the crew of the gig could hardly be kept from cheering. Explanations followed, and Lionel Lonsdale heard how easy it would be to capture the retreat, as the schooner was away with Captain Cutlass.

Half a dozen men were put on board the smack, with orders to steer for the frigate, and Franklin was told that he could ship as a sailor on the Ill Omen, for his part in the rescue of the maidens, which delighted him greatly.

Then the boats moved on to the island.

But with but a score of men there, there was no resistance, and the island was taken without a shot being fired.

On account of the part which Marcelite, the pirate's wife had played to set his sister and Lurline free, Lionel Lonsdale gave her a Cuban *goleta* of ninety tons, and what property she claimed as her own, and allowed the pirates on the island to serve as her crew, for she said she wished to go in search of her husband.

"I am sorry I cannot also go in search of him, madam; but though he has escaped me this time, I will yet hunt him down," said Lionel Lonsdale, adding:

"Please tell him so with my compliments."

"I will, sir, and for the leniency you have shown me, and those here, I thank you."

Lonsdale waited until the *goleta* sailed from the island, and then, loading the Spitfire with the guns and booty found there, and setting fire to the worthless vessels anchored in the basin, along with the pirate cabins, he sailed away from the Pirate Isle and joined the frigate, which at once squared away for the North, her young commander anxious to return his sister to their mother, whose grief he knew was most poignant.

CHAPTER LVIII.

A SEA DUEL.

To picture the sorrow and annoyance of Commodore Vernon, Major Bert Branscombe and Belle, not to speak of that of the skipper and crew of the Belle of Blue Water at their capture would be utterly impossible.

The commodore felt it more for his daughter, for he was one accustomed to take life as it came to him, and Belle tried to cheer up on this account.

The French captain was coldly polite, gave them quarters in the cabin, and said, when he could do so, without inconvenience to himself, he would land the commodore and his daughter as non-combatants, but that the major must be held as prisoner of war.

As they sailed south, Major Branscombe remarked:

"If we could only run across the Ill Omen somewhere, I guess this French captain would find it convenient to give us up."

"Pray for it, my child," said the commodore, with a smile.

Whether Belle did pray for it or not, one pleasant morning, some two weeks after the capture of the Belle of Blue Water, two sail were sighted from the mast-head of the French sloop-of-war.

The prisoners were on deck, standing together, and Major Branscombe, speaking French, heard what was said by the officers.

"One is reported to be a frigate, the other a schooner, and they head so as to come near us," he said.

The French war-vessel was under full sail, and ahead of her, under easy sail, was the Belle of Blue Water.

The strange vessels were more than a league and a half apart, but sailing on the same course, and it was evident they had sighted the Frenchmen and were heading to meet them.

Seeing this the French captain signaled to the prize officer of the brig to drop back, and going aloft he took a long look at the strangers.

"They are a frigate and schooner, evidently British, and we will fight and capture them, for I believe we are their equal, if not stronger," Major Branscombe told, was what he said to his officers.

"I will ask him for his glass a moment," said Belle, and she boldly walked up to the captain and made the request.

He seemed surprised, but relinquished it with a bow.

After a moment's observation of each vessel she handed it back with thanks.

"What vaz ze mademoiselle finds out about ze vessels?" asked the captain in broken English.

"Simply, monsieur, that we will be guests on board yonder frigate within a few hours."

"Zounds! zen zey vas Engleesh?"

"Yes, sir."

"Ve vill have ze vessels our prisoners very soon, mademoiselle."

Belle smiled, and rejoining her father and the major said in a suppressed tone:

"One is the Havenless Cruiser the other either the Spitfire or Pretty Ellen."

"That means the pirate has been taken by Lonsdale," the major said.

"Yes, and the rescue of Miss Lonsdale and Lurline."

"And our rescue, father," added Belle.

"Yes, though this will be a hard vessel to whip, and the brig will be more than a match for the schooner."

"I fear not the result of a sea duel," was Belle's confident reply, and all then watched the coming vessels.

Before long the Frenchman saw the English flag hoisted on the Ill Omen, and, as they showed their colors, their foe quickly luffed and gave them a broadside.

The French crew were at their guns, and all ready for a fight.

But this sudden and unexpected beginning of a fight surprised them, and hurt them too, for the iron hail cut among their rigging, tore through their bulwarks, dismounted one gun and lay half a dozen men upon the decks.

Instantly Commodore Vernon forced Belle to enter the cabin, but he returned and stood by the major, just as a second broadside came from the Ill Omen.

"Lonsdale means to sink the Frenchman before he can fire, at this rate," said the major with a smile.

"The French captain looks anxious," the commodore rejoined.

The broadside was then returned, and the brig opening also upon the Ill Omen it became at once a fierce combat.

"Why does not the schooner come down and join in?" cried Lonsdale.

The commodore could not answer; but neither knew that the Spitfire was full of pirate booty and had not a gun mounted upon her decks, though a number as freight, and hence Lieutenant Harold, who was in command, could not join in the battle.

But undismayed the Ill Omen rushed to the fight, and her fire became hot and fearful.

Directing his fire, as was his wont, for a few moments wholly upon one craft, Lonsdale soon crippled the brig and placed her out of the fight, after which he ran down to engage the French sloop-of-war.

The Frenchman fought bravely, but the frigate's crew knew what work their young captain had cut out for them and they did it so well that the enemy hauled down his colors half an hour after the sea duel was begun, and, to the amazement of Lionel Lonsdale, as he sprung on the deck of his prize, he was greeted with the words:

"Hello, Lonsdale, glad to see you."

"Branscombe! by the gods of war!" cried Lionel Lonsdale.

"Yes, and Commodore Vernon, too, for he has gone to the cabin to tell his daughter that we are rescued," and, a moment after, the commodore and Belle came on deck and a warm greeting took place, while Belle said, addressing the French commander:

"I offer you my sympathy, Monsieur le Capitaine, but I told you how it would be when I saw you meant to give battle to the Havenless Cruiser."

"Alas, mademoiselle, it vaz ze fortunes of war," was the response of the gallant Frenchman.

Half an hour after, the commodore, Belle and Bert Branscombe were on board the Ill Omen, and a glad meeting it was between them and the rescued captives of the pirate.

CHAPTER LIX.

CONCLUSION.

THE escape of the two captives on the Pirates' Island, through the jealousy and friendship of Marcelite, the bride of the Cuban

Corsair, just as they would have been rescued by the crew of the Haunted Cruiser under Lionel Lonsdale and Lieutenant Harold, having been made known to the reader, as also the capture of the French sloop-of-war and her prize, the Belle of Blue Water, I will now relate a circumstance that made several hearts very happy on the return run of the Ill Omen and her prizes.

The commodore, his daughter Eve, Lurline and Major Branscombe being guests on board the Haunted Cruiser, her captain said one day:

"Commodore I am going to touch on a forbidden subject, to speak a name you will not willingly hear; but I feel that I have a right to under existing circumstances, and I beg that you will listen to me in patience."

"You had a son, a noble-hearted fellow, but a little wild."

"We will not speak of him, sir," said the commodore with emotion.

"We will, sir, and I will suffer any condemnation at your will after I have told you what I wish, so listen to me."

There was something in the quiet manner of the young captain that commanded attention, and the commodore was silent.

"One night," continued Lonsdale, "your son fled from home with the brand of Cain upon him."

"It was undeserved!"

"He had been with several young men, one a bitter foe of his, and when the latter joined the party, your son left them, but he soon remembered that he had a letter in his pocket for one of the party, and returned to give it to him."

"He entered the room, to find but one person there."

"That one was his enemy, and he lay on the floor, dead, a knife in his heart."

"Your son fled, and feeling that he would be accused, sought to find those who had been with the dead man."

"He remained in hiding, and the next day learned that it was *his knife* which had been taken from the dead man's breast."

"Then he knew there was no hope for him and he left town on a coaster in disguise. He wandered about until he became mate of a vessel in Southern seas, was captured by the Cuban Corsair and forced to serve him as an officer."

"It was he who saved my sister from the pirate, and he is now first officer of my vessel."

"But more: Among some smugglers captured upon the eastern coast he recognized one of the party who were with him the night of the murder, and who had also fled the town, as you know."

"He has kept that man a prisoner on board ever since."

"And still more—he found among those on the Pirate Island another of that party."

"They have confessed that Harold Vernon was not guilty, that one of them murdered the man, with the knife that belonged to your son, and which the man who did the deed had picked up from the floor, where it had dropped."

"Now, sir, Lieutenant Harold Vernon would be glad to be welcomed by his father and sister."

And welcomed he was, in a way that made his heart glad, and the old commodore was almost beside himself with joy.

When the Haunted Cruiser arrived near port, a vessel ran down toward her with the news that war had begun between the Colonies and the mother country.

"I said I would not return to port until I had captured the Cuban Corsair, and I shall keep my vow."

"But, Major Branscombe, I give to you my written resignation of a captaincy in the king's service, and in the place of the Haunted Cruiser, which I will keep, I send in under your charge, the French sloop-of-war, so that I do not rob the king of a vessel."

"Now, major, I will transfer you, and the others to the French sloop, and then I shall sail away, in search of the One Armed Buccaneer, and also—to enlist as an American in the fight for Freedom."

So spoke Lionel Lonsdale, and, as where he went his crew would go with him, so it was arranged, and sad partings took place, his sister going home with Belle Vernon, who had promised some day to be the wife of Lionel Lonsdale, while Eve had also given a

promise something like that to Major Branscombe, "when the war should end."

So the French prize sailed into port, bearing the commodore, the major and the maidens, while the Haunted Cruiser sped away with her prize, Spitfire and the privateer brig, to serve the patriot cause of America.

That in the end Lionel Lonsdale kept his vow and captured the Cuban Corsair, and served with great distinction as an officer of the American Navy, would at once be known, were I to give the true name of the daring man who won the well-earned title of Wizard of the Waves.

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- 249 Elephant Tom, of Durango.
- 257 Death Trap Diggings.
- 283 Sleek Sam, the Devil of the Mines.
- 286 Pistol Johnny; or, One Man in a Thous.
- 292 Moke Horner, the Boss Roustabout.
- 302 Faro Saul, the Handsome Hercules.
- 317 Frank Lightfoot, the Miner Detective.
- 324 Old Forked Lightning, the Solitary.
- 331 Chispa Charley, the Gold Nugget Sport.
- 339 Spread Eagle Sam, the Hercules Hide Hunter.
- 345 Masked Mark, the Mounted Detective.
- 351 Nor' West Nick, the Border Detective.
- 355 Stormy Steve, the Mad Athlete.
- 360 Jumping Jerry, the Gamecock from Sundown.
- 367 A Royal Flush; or, Dan Brown's Big Game.
- 372 Captain Crisp, the Man with a Record.
- 379 Howling Jonathan, the Terror from Headwaters.
- 387 Dark Durg, the Ishmael of the Hills.
- 395 Deadly Aim, the Duke of Derringers.
- 403 The Nameless Sport.
- 409 Rob Roy Ranch; or, The Imps of Pan Handle.
- 416 Monte Jim, the Black Sheep of Bismarck.
- 426 The Ghost Detective; or, The Spy of the Secret Service.
- 433 Laughing Leo; or, Sam's Dandy Pard.

BY EDWARD WILLETT.

- 129 Mississippi Mose; or, a Strong Man's Sacrifice.
- 209 Buck Farley, the Bonanza Prince.
- 222 Bill the Blizzard; or, Red Jack's Crime.
- 248 Montana Nat, the Lion of Last Chance Camp.
- 274 Flush Fred, the Mississippi Sport.
- 289 Flush Fred's Full Hand.
- 298 L gger Lem; or, Life in the Pine Woods.
- 308 Hemlock Hank, Tough and True.
- 315 Flush Fred's Double; or, The Squatters' League.
- 327 Terrapin Dick, the Wildwood Detective.
- 337 Old Gabe, the Mountain Tramp.
- 348 Dan Dillon, King of Crosscut.
- 368 The Canyon King; or, a Price on his Head.

BY NED BUNTLINE.

- 14 Thayendanegea, the Scourge; or, The War-Eagle.
- 16 The White Wizard; or, The Seminole Prophet.
- 18 The Sea Bandit; or, The Queen of the Isle.
- 23 The Red Warrior; or, The Comanche Lover.
- 61 Captain Seawaif, the Privateer.
- 111 The Smuggler Captain; or, The Skipper's Crime.
- 122 Saul Sabberday, the Idiot Spy.
- 270 Andros the Rover; or, The Pirate's Daughter.
- 361 Tomstone Dick, the Train Pilot.

BY WILLIAM H. MANNING.

- 279 The Gold Dragoon, or, The California Blood-hound.
- 297 Colorado Rube, the Strong Arm of Hotspur.
- 385 Will Dick Turpin, the Leadville Lion.
- 405 Old Baldy, the Brigadier of Buck Basin.
- 415 Hot Heart, the Detective Spy.
- 427 The Rivals of Montana Mill.

BY ALBERT W. AIKEN.

- 27 The Spotter Detective; or, Girls of New York.
- 31 The New York Sharp; or, The Flash of Lightning.
- 33 Overland Kit; or, The Idyl of White Pine.
- 34 Rocky Mountain Rob, the California Outlaw.
- 35 Kentucky the Sport; or, Dick Talbot of the Mines.
- 36 Injun Dick; or, The Death-Shot of Shasta.
- 38 Velvet Hand; or, Injun Dick's Iron Grip.
- 41 Gold Dan; or, The White Savage of Salt Lake.
- 42 The California Detective; or, The Witches of N.Y.
- 49 The Wolf Demon; or, The Kanawha Queen.
- 56 The Indian Mazeppa; or, Madman of the Plains.
- 59 The Man from Texas; or, The Arkansas Outlaw.
- 63 The Winged Whale; or, The Red Rupert of Gulf.
- 72 The Phantom Hand; or, The 5th Avenue Heiress.
- 75 Gentleman George; or, Parlor, Prison and Street.
- 77 The Fresh of Frisco; or, The Heiress.
- 79 Joe Phenix, the Police Spy.
- 81 The Human Tiger; or, A Heart of Fire.
- 84 Hunted Down; or, The League of Three.
- 91 The Winning Oar; or, The Innkeeper's Daughter.
- 93 Captain Dick Talbot, King of the Road.
- 97 Bronze Jack, the California Thoroughbred.
- 101 The Man from New York.
- 107 Richard Talbot, of Cinnabar.
- 112 Joe Phenix, Private Detective.
- 130 Captain Volcano; or, The Man of Red Revolver.
- 161 The Wolves of New York; or, Joe Phenix's Hunt.
- 173 California John, the Pacific Thoroughbred.
- 196 La Marmoset, the Detective Queen.
- 203 The Double Detective; or, The Midnight Mystery.
- 252 The Wall Street Blood; or, The Telegraph Girl.
- 320 The Gentle Spotter; or, The N. Y. Night Hawk.
- 349 Iron-Hearted Dick, the Gentleman Road-Agent.
- 354 Red Richard; or, The Crimson Cross Brand.
- 363 Crowningshield, the Sleuth; or, Pitiless as Death.
- 370 The Dusky Detective; or, Pursued to the End.
- 376 Black Beards; or, The Rio Grande High Horse.
- 381 The Gypsy Gentleman; or, Nick Fox, Detective.
- 384 Injun Dick, Detective; or, Tracked to New York.
- 391 Kate Scott, the Decoy Detective.
- 408 Doc Grip, the Vendetta of Death.
- 419 The Bat of the Battery; or, Joe Phenix, Detective.
- 423 The Lone Hand; or, The Red River Recreants.

BY COLONEL DELLE SARA.

- 53 Silver Sam; or, The Mystery of De'wood City.
- 87 The Scarlet Captain; or, Prisoner of the Tower.
- 106 Shamus O'Brien, the Bould Boy of Glingal.

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- 1 A Hard Crowd; or, Gentleman Sam's Sister.
- 4 The Kidnapper; or, The Northwest Shanghai.
- 29 Tiger Dick, Faro King; or, The Cashier's Crime.
- 54 Always on Hand; or, The Foot-Hills Sport.
- 80 A Man of Nerve; or, Caliban the Dwarf.
- 114 The Gentleman from Pike.
- 171 Tiger Dick, the Man of the Iron Heart.
- 207 Old Hard Head; or, Whirlwind and his Mare.
- 251 Tiger Dick vs. Iron Despard.
- 280 Tiger Dick's Lone Hand.
- 299 Three of a Kind; or, Tiger Dick, Iron Despard and the Sportive Sport.
- 338 Jack Sands, the Boss of the Town.
- 359 Yellow Jack, the Mestizo.
- 380 Tiger Dick's Pledge; or, The Golden Serpent.
- 404 Silver Sid; or, A "Daisy" Bluff.
- 431 California Kit, the Always on Hand.

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- 390 The Giant Cupid; or, Cibuta John's Jubilee.
- 422 Blue Grass Burt, the Gold Star Detective.

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- 432 The Giant Horseman; or, Tracking the Red Cross Gang.

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